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2024 FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON 3: NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Key points:

- *Season 3 of the W2RC will span four continents (Asia, Europe, America and Africa) and usher in a new generation of talent behind the wheel of state-of-the-art machines. The old hands of rally raid are in for a challenge in 2024.*
- *The car category will see the two-time world champion Nasser Al Attiyah start a new chapter with Prodrive. Another two legends, Stéphane Peterhansel and Carlos Sainz, have also thrown their hats into the ring for 2024. The Qatari's switch gives Toyota Gazoo Racing a chance to field a fresh and young line-up.*
- *The car competition will feature a four-cornered battle in 2024, with the two-time manufacturers' world champion, Toyota Gazoo Racing, along with Prodrive, X-raid Mini JCW and, for the first time, Audi Sport.*
- *Several movers and shakers in the Challenger category have moved up to Ultimate, leaving an opening for the aces of the SSV category (formerly T4) to switch to Challenger. The SSV hierarchy is wide open and new faces have already made a splash.*
- *In the motorbike category, Monster Energy Honda, a two-time manufacturers' world champion, is still in the hunt for an individual title. By bumping up the young Tosha Schareina to their works team in 2024, following the signing of Skyler Howes in mid-2023, HRC have boosted their squad to six riders. The team is ready to paint the town red. Their toughest opponent will be the Indian outfit Hero MotoSports, in no small part thanks to their recruitment of the reds' former sharpshooter, Joan "Bang Bang" Barreda.*
- *In the Rally2 motorbike competition, Romain Dumontier is out to defend his title against his long-time rivals. In the quad category, Laisvydas Kancius will face opponents of the calibre of Alexandre Giroud and Manuel Andújar, the winners of the last three editions of the Dakar.*

The entry list for Season 3 has been revealed with the opening round of the 2024 W2RC —the 46th edition of the Dakar, scheduled for 5 to 19 January— just around the corner.

43 FIA vehicles and 37 FIM motorbikes and quads have picked up the gauntlet, amounting to a total of 80 machines.

Al Attiyah jumps ship, triple or nothing for Toyota

After seven seasons with Toyota Gazoo Racing, three Dakar wins (2019, 2022 and 2023) and a brace in the W2RC, **Nasser Al Attiyah** has switched sides to Prodrive, where he will be racing behind the wheel of a Hunter in Nasser Racing colours. To fill his shoes, Toyota Gazoo Racing has decided to bet on the future by signing up no fewer than three young drivers! **Lucas Moraes** and **Seth Quintero**, competing in Red Bull colours, are the two new faces of the official TGR team. The TGR South Africa driver **Saood Variawa** will back them in the championship. This makes the 32-year-old **Moraes**, third in the 2023 Dakar, the first Brazilian car driver in a rally-raid factory team. Red Bull's American whiz kid, **Seth Quintero**, is just 21 years old. After three seasons learning the ropes in the category now known as "Challenger", the heaviest hitter of the class of 2023 has been promoted to Ultimate with a whopping 20 Dakar stage wins under his belt. **Saood Variawa** will make his W2RC debut this season. At the tender age of 18, the youngest driver of the category finished in second place in his first season in South African GT Racing. The latest scion of a dynasty of drivers is following in the footsteps of his father **Shameer**, 21st in the 2020 Dakar and 15th in the 2021 edition with the same team.

The world number 1 will have to contend with a total of nine Hilux EVO T1+! **Al Attiyah** is up for a rematch with his runner-up, **Yazeed Al Rajhi**, who claimed the two rounds out of five that did not go to the Qatari in 2023 (Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and Rallye du Maroc). The Saudi is still sharing the Overdrive Racing

stable with **Juan-Cruz Yacopini**, the young Argentinian who rounded out the 100% Hilux podium of Season 2, and **Denis Krotov**. As in the last round of 2023, they will be backed by **Jean-Marc Fortin**'s two fresh recruits: **Guerlain Chicherit**, who moved from Prodrive, and **Guillaume de Mevius**. The Belgian is stepping up to the big league in his 30th year after two seasons cutting his teeth in Challenger.

Toyota have picked **Yazeed Al Rajhi**, **Seth Quintero** and **Lucas Moraes** to defend their double crown as the manufacturers' world champions. Over at Prodrive, **Al Attiyah** will be escorted by the Brazilian brothers **Marcos** and **Cristian Baumgart**, who made their debut in their Hunter X Rally in 2023.

Mini goes big as Audi springs a surprise

But wait, there are many more challengers eager to topple **Al Attiyah** and Toyota from their thrones! Against the British and Japanese teams, two other manufacturers are joining the fray, and they are no slouches either. The 2023 runners-up, X-raid JCW Mini, will field two Mini JCW Rally Plus and bet the farm on a combination of youth and experience. **Krzysztof Hołowczyc** is teaming up with the young **Pau Navarro**, who made his T1+ debut in a Hilux in the 2023 Rallye du Maroc before taking part in the Next Gen Tryouts organised by the FIA and the promoter at the end of the W2RC finale. The trial run of the 19-year-old Spaniard behind the wheel of the Mini paid off, as he got himself a spot on **Sven Quandt's** squad.

Audi Sport has entered the W2RC manufacturers' competition for the first time with **Mattias Ekström**, **Stéphane Peterhansel** and **Carlos Sainz**. The three RS-Q eTron cars will be on the start line of the next Dakar, and the brand with the four interlocking rings reserves the right to register one or more of its hybrid vehicles for the rest of the championship.

Power vacuum in Challenger

It has only been two seasons and the W2RC scheme is already paying dividends. The SSV and Challenger categories, designed by the FIA as a succession of springboards leading to Ultimate, the top tier of rally raids, will be interconnected in 2024. The promotion of some of the Challenger big guns to the premier division has left an opening for SSV drivers to level up too. Just like the big league, the Challenger competition will see a fierce battle between veterans and newcomers. The Americans are the men to beat. **Mitch Guthrie**, the runner-up to Quintero last year, is gearing up for his third season in the category behind the wheel of his MCE-5, still under the aegis of Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA by BFG. **Austin Jones** (Can-Am Factory), third in the championship in Season 2, will once again be a force to be reckoned with. Numbers 2 and 3 in the category are salivating at the prospect of becoming number 1. The Lithuanian two-time SSV champion **Rokas Baciūška** will be Jones's teammate in Can-Am Factory and intends to give them a run for their money. South Racing Can-Am will be pinning its hopes on the old rocker **David Zille**. As if that were not enough, the three **Goczals** are also moving up to Challenger! **Eryk**, who won the SSV race of the 2023 Dakar at age 18, his father **Marek** and his uncle **Michał** will be driving Energylandia's Taurus T3 Max cars. The vehicle developed by **Guthrie Jr.** has a wide appeal, with Wevers Sport's **Dania Akeel** and **Nicolás Cavigliasso** also picking this car.

Blood in the water in SSV

Now that **Baciūška**, Navarro and the **Goczals** have moved up the W2RC ladder, the SSV category is starting 2024 with a blank slate! Great news for a new generation eager to make a statement in the basic category of rally raids. However, some already put their names on the map in 2023! **João Ferreira** was the sole entrant to downsize last season. The Portuguese lit up the Challenger competition last year, only to try his hand in an SSV in the final round of 2023. His gamble paid off, as he stormed to victory and earned a spot on Can-Am Factory for 2024! His main rival in Morocco was a W2RC rookie but a household name on the US off-road racing scene, and she almost denied him the triumph. **Sara Price**—**Ricky Brabec's** partner and no relation to **Toby Price**— will be leading the charge for South Racing Can-Am. Faced with these two first-timers, **Yasir Seaidan**, **Sebastián Guayasamín** (FN Speed), **Michele Cinotto** (Xtrem Plus CST Polaris), **Eduardo Pons** (South Racing Can-Am) and others will be hoping that their experience carries the day.

Honda rolls out the big guns as Hero nets Barreda

In the wake of the W2RC podium spots claimed by **Ricky Brabec** (second in 2022) and **Adrien Van Beveren** (third in 2022 and 2023), Monster Energy Honda are hungry for the top spot. They laid down a marker last year when HRC signed the American **Skyler Howes** to back up its four factory riders. Now, the publication of the 2024 W2RC FIM lists has dispelled any lingering doubts. The reds are fielding six riders following the promotion of **Tosha Schareina**, the breakthrough performer in the 2023 RallyGP competition, to their works team. Such a deep roster makes it difficult for their opponents to defeat their riders in detail and puts Honda in the pole position to take its third manufacturers' title. However, Hero MotoSports is certainly not going down without a fight. **Wolfgang Fisher's** team is returning with the rock-solid **Ross Branch**, **Joaquim Rodrigues** and **Sebastian Bühler**, as well as adding another bullet to its chamber. While the Indian team does not have as much ammo as Honda, the round in its chamber has already frayed the nerves of every single contender in RallyGP. Indeed, **Joan Barreda**, the most prolific Dakar stage hunter still in the game, with 29 victories to his name, will be starting his twelfth Dakar in 2024. If everything falls into place in Yanbu, "**Bang Bang**" could carry his form over to the other rounds of the W2RC. And, who knows, perhaps the lone ranger will morph into a super-Hero and get the better of the HRC samurais!

Nail-biters in Rally2 and quads

In Rally2, **Romain Dumontier** (Dumontier Racing), the reigning number one, is up for a rematch with his runner-up, **Paolo Lucci** (BAS World KTM Racing). The South African **Bradley Cox** (BAS World KTM Racing) is still eager to follow in the footsteps of his father and improve his consistency. **Jean-Loup Lapan** (Duust Rally), on the other hand, set a metronomic pace to finish third on the overall podium in 2023. The Frenchman will continue to gain experience. Other men to watch who have already shown flashes of brilliance are **Michael Docherty** and **Kerim Fitzgerald** (BAS World KTM Racing), as well as **Kinigadner's** nephew, **Tobias Ebster** (Kini Rally Racing).

In the quad competition, the world number one, **Laisvydas Kancius** (Story Racing SRO), is back to defend his title against rivals of the calibre of **Alexandre Giroud** (Yamaha Racing SMX Drag'on), a two-time winner of the Dakar (2022 and 2023), and the 2021 Dakar champion **Manuel Andújar** (Drag'on Rally). The Lithuanian will also clash with his W2RC frenemies, including Juraj Varga (Varga Motorsport), **Francisco Moreno** (Drag'on Rally) and **Marcelo Medeiros** (Taguatur Racing).

More information www.worldrallyraidchampionship.com/en/

List of FIM entries [HERE](#); FIA entries [HERE](#)

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