

Yanbu, January 19<sup>th</sup> 2024

## THE 2023 CHAMPIONS SHAKEN UP

### Key points:

- *The verdict was pronounced today on the Dakar, the first of five legs on the 2024 calendar. The least that can be said is that season 3 is already full of surprises! There has been an almost complete sea change in the FIA car and FIM Rally GP categories, which promises a season full of twists and turns. In only one month's time, the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge will represent an opportunity for revenge for the champions of 2023, who were shaken up on the Dakar.*
- *In the Rally GP class, Ricky Brabec (Monster Energy Honda) took command ahead of Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports) and Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda), the only rider to live up to his rank in 2023. In the Rally 2 class, title holder Romain Dumontier (Dumontier Racing) confirmed his domination, ahead of Bradley Cox (BAS World KTM Racing) and Jean-Loup Lèpan (Duust Diverse Racing). In the quad category, Manuel Andújar (7240 Team – Drag'on Rally Service) marked his return to the top ahead of Alexandre Giroud (Yamaha Racing – SMX – Drag'on) and Juraj Varga (Varga Motorsports).*
- *On four wheels, two different names feature at the forefront of the championship: Carlos Sainz with Audi. The two usual aces, Nasser Al Attiyah (Nasser Racing Prodrive) and Yazeed Al Rahji (Toyota Overdrive), none other than the reigning world champion and runner-up, did not reach Yanbu. Jean-Marc Fortin's two jokers in the pack, namely Guillaume de Mevius and Guerlain Chicherit, took advantage and took their places on the Dakar to move onto the provisional podium.*

### BIKES/QUADS: HONDA AND HERO SAIL AWAY

It is no secret that the Monster Energy Honda riders are capable of teamwork, given that they have twice helped the winged brand to the constructors' title. However, individually over the last two years, the reds had not been as forceful as their collective strength. On this edition of the Dakar, the reds combined their renowned pack know-how with personal successes that have shaken up the established order. This complete control of racing strategy has today placed **Ricky Brabec** (38 points), who is now a two-times Dakar winner following his first triumph in 2020, in command of the championship. Positions 3, 4 and 5 in the season's initial rankings are also bright red. **Adrien Van Beveren** (24 points) retains the same 3<sup>rd</sup> place that he occupied on completion of the last two seasons. **Nacho Cornejo** (20 points), the leading stage win collector on this year's Dakar with three successes, is 4<sup>th</sup>. **Pablo Quintanilla** (17 points), despite running out of fuel which distanced him from the rally's summit, is 5<sup>th</sup>. Faced with this Honda tidal wave on the shores of the Red Sea, only one rider in white managed to resist. **Ross Branch** (30 points), the only escapee to not sink without trace from Hero's four-man crew, including new recruit **Joan Barreda**, withstood everything come hell or high water. The man from Botswana climbed onto the Dakar podium for the first time after battling alone against Brabec and his entourage during the entire second week. In the constructors' championship, Honda have the upper hand with 62 points thanks to the two places on the podium achieved by **Brabec** and **Van Beveren**. However, with the 30 points collected from **Branch's** second place, Hero remain within touching distance.

In the Rally 2 class, the 2023 W2RC podium did not receive as much of a buffeting as in the Rally GP class. World cup winner **Romain Dumontier** distinguished himself on the Dakar ahead of **Bradley Cox**, who finished 4<sup>th</sup> at the end of last season. **Jean-Loup Lèpan**, who was number 3 in 2023, also maintained his status. **Paolo Lucci** (BAS World KTM Racing) exited the Dakar prematurely following a fall. The Italian is the only one of the leading lights from 2023 to make a false start this season.

In the quad category, **Manuel Andújar** equalled **Alexandre Giroud** on the Dakar roll of honour by winning in Yanbu following his victory in 2021. Now a two-times winner, the Argentinean has taken the lead in the championship, ahead of the Frenchman who triumphed in 2022 and 2023 on the first leg of the championship. **Juraj Varga** maintained his position on the season's opener. Following third last year, the Slovak leaves the Dakar in this same place. **Laisvydas Kancius** (Story Racing), the previous number 1, has currently dropped down to fourth position, but last year the Lithuanian proved that his perseverance and consistency are his weapons of choice.

### RALLY GP RIDERS

1. RICKY BRABEC (USA) MONSTER ENERGY HONDA (38 POINTS)
2. ROSS BRANCH (BWA) HERO MOTOSPORTS (30 POINTS)
3. ADRIEN VAN BEVEREN (FR) MONSTER ENERGY HONDA (24 POINTS)

### CONSTRUCTORS

1. MONSTER ENERGY HONDA (62 POINTS)
2. HERO MOTOSPORTS (30 POINTS)

### RALLY 2

1. ROMAIN DUMONTIER (FRA) DUMONTIER RACING (38 POINTS)
2. BRADLEY COX (ZAF) BAS WORLD KTM RACING (30 POINTS)
3. JEAN-LOUP LEPAN (FRA) DUUST DIVERSE RACING (24 POINTS)

### QUADS

1. MANUEL ANDUJAR (ARG) 7240 TEAM DRAGON RALLY SERVICE (38 POINTS)
2. ALEXANDER GIROUD (FRA) YAMAHA RACING – SMX – DRAG'ON (30 POINTS)
3. JURAJ VARGA (SVK) VARGA MOTORSPORT (24 POINTS)

### CARS / CHALLENGER / SSV: AL ATTIYAH & AL RAJHI FORCE TO WAIT FOR ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY

On paper, the menu for the **46<sup>th</sup> edition of the Dakar** with its innovative 48 HR Chrono stage in the Empty Quarter seemed set to whet the appetites of **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Yazeed Al Rajhi**, who have feasted on dunes since their debuts. Yet, it was precisely on stage 6 spread over two days that the Saudi and then the Qatari lost their hopes of beginning their seasons with a banquet of points. The exit from the rally after rolling his Hilux over must have been hard to swallow for the runner-up in last season's world championship, while the world champion must have received the time lost to a broken steering rod like a punch in the gut. Following two days dotted with a series of mechanical problems, **Nasser** made his exit from the rally on the evening of stage 9. Race numbers 1 and 2, who did not leave the slightest morsel for anyone else in 2023 (with 3 wins for **Al Attiyah** and 2 for **Al Rajhi** out of the five legs cooked up), left the Dakar with their hunger for overall triumph unsatiated. **Carlos Sainz** and **Lucas Cruz** in their Audi were not that greedy. With their win, the Spaniards have taken advantage of the diet enforced in terms of points on the leading lights of last season to open up a big gap in the championship (with 76 points).

Among the entrants for season 3, it was **Guillaume de Mevius** (with 58 points) and **Guerlain Chicherit** (56 points) who benefitted. Thanks to his two stage wins, the man from Savoy has been able to close the gap in the provisional standings on his lieutenant, with the two Overdrive Racing Hilux cars separated by just two points. In the constructors' rankings, Toyota have not benefited from the Frenchman and Belgian's contributions. Toyota Gazoo Racing designated **Lucas Moraes** and **Seth Quintero** as their lead drivers and the two men finished the rally with a collection of 63 points in their cockpits. This is not enough to enable the Japanese brand, currently the double world title holder in the constructors' championship, to leave the Dakar in the lead, a situation it was previously used to.

On the next leg at the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, **Al Attiyah**, **Al Rajhi** and newcomers TGR will set about trying to claw points back. They will have their work cut out, because it was the RS Q e-tron driven by **Stéphane Peterhansel** that won in 2023... once **Al Attiyah** had exited a race that he looked set to win after rolling his car. The championship promises to provide more plot twists very soon!

In the Challenger class, the leading drivers from last year also managed to make a good start. **Mitch Guthrie** (Taurus Factory) leads the drivers enrolled on the championship in the final rankings of the Dakar (with 85 points), ahead of the SSV category title holder, **Rokas Baciūška** (Can-Am Factory) who has made his mark in his new category (68 points). Brazilian **Marcelo Gastaldi** (BBR) occupies 3<sup>rd</sup> place (52 points) ahead of

Argentinean **Nicolás Cavigliasso** (Taurus Factory), who is 2 points behind. Official Can-Am driver **Austin Jones** (48 points) has experienced a difficult beginning to the season.

In the SSV category, Saudi driver **Yasir Seidan** (MMP) has put himself in the lead on home soil (91 points) ahead of the new American recruit at South Racing Can-Am, **Sara Price** (74 points) and Portuguese official Can-Am driver, **João Ferreira** (73 points).

#### ULTIMATE DRIVERS / CO-PILOTS

1. CARLOS SAINZ (ESP) / LUCAS CRUZ (ESP) AUDI SPORT (76 POINTS)
2. GUILLAUME DE MEVIUS (BEL) / XAVIER PANSERI (FRA) OVERDRIVE RACING (58 POINTS)
3. GUERLAIN CHICHERIT (FRA) / ALEX WINOCK (FRA) OVERDRIVE RACING (56 POINTS)

#### CONSTRUCTORS

1. AUDI SPORT (76 POINTS)
2. TOYOTA GAZOO RACING (63 POINTS)
3. NASSER RACING BY PRODRIVE (30 POINTS)
4. X-RAID MINI JCW (20 POINTS)

#### CHALLENGER DRIVERS / CO-PILOTS

1. MITCH GUTHRIE (USA) / KELLON WALCH (USA) TAURUS FACTORY (85 POINTS)
2. ROKAS BACIUSKA (LTU) / ORIOL VIDAL (ESP) CAN-AM FACTORY (68)
3. MARCELO GASTALDI (BRA) / CARLOS SACHS (BRA) BBR (52)

#### SSV DRIVERS / CO-PILOTS

1. YASIR SEIDAN (SAU) / ADRIEN METGE (FRA) MMP (91 POINTS)
2. SARA PRICE (USA) / JEREMY GRAY (USA) SOUTH RACING CAN-AM (74 POINTS)
3. JOAO FERREIRA (PRT) / FILIPE PALMEIRO (PRT) CAN-AM FACTORY (73 POINTS)

More information [www.worldrallyraidchampionship.com/en/](http://www.worldrallyraidchampionship.com/en/)

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