

Mezaira'a, 1 March 2024

2024 Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS AL ATTIYAH TAKES CONTROL AS MARE STAYS THE COURSE

Key points

- On the eve of the finish of the second round on the calendar, the penultimate stage of the 33rd edition of the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge again delivered on its promise with a roller-coaster of emotions.
- Aaron Mare (Hero MotoSports) won the FIM motorbike stage and expanded his lead over Konrad Dąbrowski (Duust Rally) to 10'14". The Pole's teammate, Jean-Loup Lèpan, came in second in the stage and defended his overall podium spot at 22'05". Ross Branch finished just outside the podium of the special and stayed in the same place overall, 47'55" off the pace. Abdulaziz Ahli, in a league of his own, continued his relentless march towards a fourth consecutive quad title.
- Nasser Al Attiyah (Nasser Racing by Prodrive) retook the lead in the car competition. Seth Quintero had begun the day with a 1'10" margin, but he finished the stage in second place, 9'21" adrift. Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) remained third overall at 12'07". Guerlain Chicherit had to throw in the towel.
- Austin Jones and Rokas Baciūška held on to the overall lead in the Challenger class after another dominant performance. Yasir Seidan (MMP) is still the top-ranked championship entrant in the SSV race.

FIM: BRANCH THROWS MARE A LIFELINE

Believe it or not, **Ross Branch** did not tip the balance in favour of his teammate on purpose! The Botswanan, opening the road today, made a navigation blunder about a hundred kilometres into the stage, dragging **Jean-Loup Lèpan** and **Konrad Dąbrowski** —the main threat to **Aaron Mare** in the fight for the title— down with him. Starting in fourth place, all **Mare** had to do was close the gap to the disoriented three-man lead group and stick with it until the finish. It was a simple yet devastatingly effective trick. The South African put another 5'09" into the Pole, bringing his total margin to 10'14" going into the finale. **Jean-Loup Lèpan**, the runner-up at 2'04", picked up his maiden Rally 2 stage win in the race. He stands 22'05" behind the overall leader. **Ross Branch** finished fourth on the day and slipped further down the standings, where he now trails his Hero teammate **Mare** by 47'55". The last-minute back-up is on track to earn the Indian maker its first W2RC triumph. **Branch** will get a consolation prize, though, if he manages to finish just outside the podium in the ADDC. That would be enough for the Dakar runner-up to take the hot seat in the championship. Their collective effort could also hand Hero MotoSports the lead in the manufacturers' ranking.

Kamil Wiśniewski (Orlen) hit the deck and withdrew from the quad special yesterday. The Pole, still reeling from his crash, decided not to take the start this morning, giving **Abdulaziz Ahli** an even clearer run in his duel with **Hani Alnoumesi**. The Emirati bagged his fourth stage win on the trot and can almost touch his fourth consecutive title on home soil.

FIA: AL ATTIYAH PUTS THE PEDAL TO THE METAL

Another day, another batch of favourites bowing out of the ADDC. **Juan Cruz Yacopini** (Overdrive Racing), third in the previous edition and in the championship last season, was disqualified for resorting to outside assistance in yesterday's special. **Nasser Al Attiyah** bolted out of the gates this morning hell-bent on erasing his 1'10" deficit to yesterday's winner, **Seth Quintero**. The Hunter and his Qatari topped the board at each intermediate time check and romped home with 10'31" in hand over the American, who came in fourth in the stage and slipped to second overall, 9'21" back. Second place in the stage appeared to have **Guerlain**

Chicherit's name written all over it, but about ten kilometres before the line, The Fall Guy dived headfirst into a dune, burying his prospects of finishing on the bottom step of the overall podium. His co-driver, **Alex Winocq**, hurt his lower back in the crash, prompting the Frenchman to call for an airlift out of an abundance of caution. Their misfortune echoes that of their teammate **Guillaume de Mévius** two days ago. **Yazeed Al Rajhi** took second in the stage, 8'21" down on the two-time world champion. The ADDC champion and runner-up to the Qatari in the W2RC is now third overall at 12'07". **Martin Prokop's** accident in the dunes yesterday may have taken him out of the fight, but it certainly did not take the fight out of him, as the Orlen Jipocard driver proved today by finishing on a stage podium that was a who's who of recent winner of the rally: **Al Attiyah** (2008, 2016 and 2021), **Al Rajhi** (2023) and **Prokop** (2018).

De Mévius and **Chicherit**, second and third in the championship following the Dakar, are feeling the heat from **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Yazeed Al Rajhi** on the eve of the finale of the second round of the W2RC. The Qatari has a legitimate shot at second place, while the Saudi will be knocking on the door of the podium.

Austin Jones and **Rokas Baciūška** landed Can-Am Factory their third double of the week in the Challenger class. The American now leads the Lithuanian by 7'08". With the championship lead at stake, he would do well to keep his rivals close... and his teammate closer! **Dania Akeel** (Taurus Factory Wevers) ranks third among the W2RC entrants. **Yasir Seidan** (MMP) emerged victorious from the SSV special. The Saudi championship leader was the fastest W2RC competitor, ahead of **Sebastián Guayasamín** (FN Speed) and **Rebecca Busi** (OnlyFans Racing).

Tomorrow

2 March: Stage 5: Abu Dhabi Aviation (total: 423 km / special: 205 km)

Find out more on the [site](#).
Official Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge site [here](#).

FIA: start list for stage 5 [here](#).

FIM: start list for stage 5 [here](#).

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