

Merzouga, 2 April 2019

AFRIQUIA MERZOUGA RALLY

Metge, Dutrie and Al-Attiyah, the legendary trio!

31 March to 5 April 2019

The competitors continue to move up the learning curve on the tracks of south-eastern Morocco. Stage 2 saw the field tackle a 212 km special as part of the 307.2 km course. Michael Metge (motorbikes), Axel Dutrie (quads) and Nasser Al-Attiyah (side-by-sides) took the spoils. It was a perfect stage for the competitors to hone their skills and inch closer to their dream of racing the Dakar.

Key points:

- Michael Metge (motorbikes), Axel Dutrie (quads) and Nasser Al-Attiyah (side-by-sides) took the spoils
- With a large dune sector, sandy stretches and a mountain crossing, today's stage was not for the faint of heart
- Wednesday's 229 km special will take the competitors to a bivouac in the middle of the desert for the marathon stage
- The Afriquia Merzouga Rally, held under the high patronage of King Mohammed VI, is a leading rally raid now in its tenth edition
- The presence of 127 competitors from 27 countries underscores the appeal of the event

STORY OF THE DAY. Nowhere in the world is safe from rally fever!

It is a passion that knows no borders, generation gaps or cultural differences. Racing on the other side of the world is the very essence of rally raids, and competitors in the Afriquia Merzouga Rally, who hail from 27 different countries, know it better than anyone else. Among them are India's **Aravind Prabhakar** and **Abdul Wahid**. "I've been racing off-road back in India for a long time, but tackling the dunes like we do here in Morocco... You can't put a price tag on that!", says Abdul, now in his second Afriquia Merzouga Rally. He dreams of racing the Dakar, just like Aussie **Jamie McCanney** and **Myunggul Ryu**, the first South Korean to take part in the Afriquia Merzouga Rally. "I also want to be the first one to start the Dakar", explains Myunggul. "Rally raids are becoming increasingly popular in South Korea." The bivouac is more cosmopolitan than ever before —an encouraging sign for the future of the sport and the atmosphere in the bivouac.

STAGE OF THE DAY. Metge strikes again with Mena and Van Beveren ready to pounce

"The good thing about Morocco is that we get to take in a stunning variety of landscapes in just a few kilometres", pointed out an amateur competitor yesterday. Today's stage proved him right, with a 212 km of special including a large dune sector around Merzouga, sandy stretches and a mountain crossing. Frenchman **Michael Metge** (Sherco) followed up his victory in the prologue on Sunday with another win in the motorbike category. Metge managed to prevail over Spaniard **Oriol Mena** (Hero, + 1'16") and yesterday's winner, fellow countryman **Adrien Van Beveren** (Yamaha, + 1'34"). However, the man from northern France did enough to defend his overall lead over today's winner. **Nasser Al-Attiyah** took his second stage in a row in the Side by Side category and increased his lead in the general classification to 46'16" over **Dani Solà**. Not to be outdone, Frenchman Axel Dutrie also claimed his second stage in this year's race and padded his overall lead. The day ended with a navigation course —a godsend to many competitors ahead of tomorrow's complex stage.

HEARD IN THE BIVOUAC

Michael Metge (1st in motorbikes, Sherco TVS, FRA): "Navigation was really hard today. I kept an eye on Adrien [Van Beveren], who navigated supremely well, to have a line to follow and keep up the pace. This helped me to win the stage. It's my first Afriquia Merzouga Rally and I'm having a blast! I hope I'll continue to have fun!"

Oriol Mena (2nd in motorbikes, Hero, ESP): "I felt really well today. The second part of the special was fantastic, even more so because I didn't make any navigational mistakes. I'm not one to obsess about the result, but it's still great to do as well as I did today. I hope to be just as successful tomorrow!"

Adrien Van Beveren (3rd in motorbikes, Yamaha, FRA): "I spent the entire special opening the race and it was really tricky. Not losing more than a minute in these conditions is an outstanding result. The best way to train and improve is to race, and the Afriquia Merzouga Rally is the best rally to learn new things. **If you can** do well in a stage here, it means you're ready to take part in the Dakar. As for me, I hope I can win and dedicate the victory to all the Yamaha folks who support me."

Nasser Al-Attiyah (1st in side-by-sides, Qatar, Can-Am): "We got lost! In the last five kilometres, we were bent on following a bike, but it turned out the rider had made a navigational mistake. It was an awesome day, though, and we're still enjoying ourselves and learning a lot. We knew we were going to perform at a high level, but we've always wanted to show respect for the other drivers. I'm looking forward to the marathon stage!"

Amaury Baratin (motorbikes, KTM, FRA): "I'm 45 years old and I come from the Paris region. At the beginning, I took part in a bunch of road and endurance races. I've always wanted to tackle the challenge of rally raids. I came here on my own and had my bike shipped in a chest all the way from France. I love riding from sunrise to sunset. Racing here is no trivial matter, as finishing the race qualifies you to start the Dakar. It's a real motivation!"

PROVISIONAL* STAGE CLASSIFICATIONS.

MOTORBIKES

- 1– Michael Metge (FRA/Sherco) 3 h 42'09"
- 2– Oriol Mena (ESP/Hero) + 1'16"
- 3– Adrien Van Beveren (FRA/Yamaha) + 1'34"

QUADS

- 1- Axel Dutrie (FRA/Yamaha) 4 h 35'59"
- 2- Facundo Viel (ARG/Yamaha) + 9"
- 3- Toni Vingut (ESP/Yamaha) + 1 h 02'06"

SIDE BY SIDE

- 1– Nasser Al-Attiyah (QAT/Can-Am) 4 h 02'02"
- 2– Conrad Rautenbach (ZIM/Can-Am) + 10'59"
- 3– Juan Miguel Medero (ESP/Can-Am) + 17'28"

***CHECK OUT the detailed results of today's stage and the general classification on our site and dedicated social media pages**

PROGRAMME: Stage 3: round 1 of the marathon stage!

Another long day awaits the field of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally. The 229.59 km special is divided into two parts (89 km and 107 km) and riddled with navigational pitfalls. The stage will take the drivers and riders to the heart of the desert. Today is the first half of the marathon stage, which leaves competitors without their assistance crews. The starry night will make for an unforgettable experience and boost the competitors' morale before they get going again in the early hours.

More information on the site of the rally www.afriquiamerzougarally.com

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