

Merzouga, 3 April 2019

AFRIQUIA MERZOUGA RALLY

Metge out, Van Beveren and Al-Attiyah lead the way!

31 March to 5 April 2019

A night under the stars and in the heart of the desert. This Wednesday, at the conclusion of 229kms of special stage, the competitors made their way to a bivouac in the middle of the tracks after the first portion of the marathon stage (with no assistance). The day was particularly eventful between the sandy and rocky tracks. One of the favourites in the bike class, Michael Metge, was forced to retire. Adrien Van Beveren went on for the win, as did Al-Attiyah (Side by Side) and Axel Dutrie (quad).

Key points:

- Prologue and stage 2 winner, Michael Metge (Hero) retired
- The three stage winners of the day, Van Beveren (bike), Nasser Al-Attiyah (Side by Side) and Axel Dutrie (quad) lead the general classification in their respective categories
- The competitors will sleep under the stars tonight after the first portion of the marathon stage
- Thursday, 205,27 kms of special stage await the competitors for stage 4

STORY OF THE DAY. Passion, always stronger than the disappointments

In rally-raid, nothing is linear. What is true on the tracks on a daily basis - the obligation to question oneself, the fight against doubt, chasing away trepidations - is also true for a competitor's career. You have to learn how to fall, lose everything and then get back up. In the Xaluca bivouac, you come across competitors who attempt the Dakar adventure and who do not manage to go all the way. Frenchman **Charlie Herbst** dropped out at the end of day 7 in Peru this past January. *"My ankle still isn't healed but I had to come back. The Afriquia Merzouga Rally is perfect for gaining experience and bouncing back"*. **Jean-Remy Berghoune** (Side by Side) lived the same misadventure. *"In rally-raid, you have to expect that sometimes it doesn't work out. But failure is never crippling and we have to continue to move forward."* **David Casteu** with 11 Dakars to his credit and Sherco team manager, adds: *"When you retire, the disappointment is at the same level as the many sacrifices that have to be made just to participate in the Dakar. But it also shapes a competitor, it hardens him and makes him stronger."* In the Afriquia Merzouga Rally, all the participants are aware of this, because *"rally-raid runs through their veins!"*, kids **David Casteu**.

STAGE OF THE DAY.

"A rally-raid wouldn't be the same without a marathon stage", says winner of this year's Dakar, **Nasser Al-Attiyah**, who is attempting the adventure in Side by Side. The competitors, who set off early in this Wednesday morning to begin the first portion of the marathon stage, share this opinion. On the programme: 229kms of special stage particularly delicate under a dark and menacing sky. The tracks were a lot rockier and severe than the previous day, reinforcing the threat of taking a spill or having a mechanical issue. Frenchman **Michael Metge** (Hero), who was obliged to open the stage following his win the previous day, suffered a broken motor at km 198. He was picked up by helicopter. **Adrien Van Beveren**, who until then rode near Metge went on for the win. The French Yamaha rider claimed his second stage win and padded his lead in the general classification. It was the same story for France's **Axel Dutrie**, who took top honours among the quads and Qatar's **Nasser Al-Attiyah** in Side by Side. The Qatari native had to cope with a broken universal joint, but he made the repairs during the neutralization. Canadian rider **Jack Lindin**, who was participating in his 2nd Afriquia Merzouga Rally retired after a fall.

HEARD IN THE BIVOUAC

Michael Metge (retired, motorbikes, FRA): *"I had a mechanical problem 25kms from the finish. The engine broke, there was nothing left to do. However, I had fun on this rally. I opened the stages quite often. It is a very good preparation. Now, the team will try to change the engine in order to finish the rally just for the fun of it."*

Nasser Al-Attiyah (1st in side-by-sides, QAT): *"I have had a really good feeling since the start of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally. I am very happy to be with all the competitors tonight for this marathon stage. We only read the roadbook this morning, but it didn't bother Matthieu (Baumel, his co-driver)."*

Calheine Perry (motorbikes, ZAF): *"I would like to become the first South African rider to participate in the Dakar. The Afriquia Merzouga Rally provides a great opportunity to improve, but also qualify for the 2020 Dakar. I am not used to riding in the dunes, especially when the sand is as heavy as it is here. What is interesting about the Afriquia Merzouga Rally is the attention given to navigation. When you are behind and there are so many tracks, you can only trust the road book. It is very instructive!"*

PROVISIONAL* STAGE CLASSIFICATIONS.

MOTORBIKES

- 1- Adrien Van Beveren (Fra, Yamaha) 3 h 29'10"
- 2- Stefan Svitko (Slo, KTM) + 2'23"
- 3- Mena Oriol (Esp, Hero) + 3'08"

QUADS

- 1- Axel Dutrie (Fra, Yamaha) 4 h 01 min 09
- 2- Clément Jay (Fra, Yamaha) + 53"
- 3- Toni Vingut (Esp, Yamaha) + 14'54"

SIDE BY SIDE

- 1- Nasser Al-Attayah (Qat, Can-Am) 3 h 47'40"
- 2- Conrad Rautenbach (Zim, Can-Am) + 4'32"
- 3- José Antonio Hinojo (Es, Can-Am) + 5'43"

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

PROGRAMME: Stage 4: Back to Xaluca!

After the night under the stars comes the 2nd portion of the marathon stage. And it won't be a stroll in the park. It is in fact, the marquee stage of the rally with 205.27kms to cover. The bodies and machines will be put to the task in the immensity of the dunes and the numerous complicated sectors. At the end of the day, the participants will finally be able to enjoy a well-deserved rest. They will need to charge their batteries ahead of the ultimate stage and the very spectacular group start. Long live tomorrow!

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

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