

Merzouga, 4 April 2019

AFRIQUIA MERZOUGA RALLY

Under starry skies

31 March to 5 April 2019

Magical moments in the heart of the desert. Participants in the 10th edition of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally spent the evening together but without their support crews as part of the famous marathon stage. After a fresh and industrious night, it was time to get back on the road for the penultimate stage, a gruelling 205.27 km trek to the bivouac at Hotel Xaluca.

Key points:

- Competitors tackled the second half of the marathon stage, a 205.27 km special leading back to the bivouac at Hotel Xaluca
- The environmental footprint of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally, held under the high patronage of King Mohammed VI, is close to nil
- Mass start planned for the final stage on Friday
- Competitors who manage to finish the rally while fulfilling the relevant criteria will be eligible to take part in the next Dakar, scheduled for January 2020
- The refreshed stage results and general classifications can be found on our website and dedicated social media pages

THE ATMOSPHERE. A night in the heart of the desert

Wednesday evening, somewhere out on the desert plains of south-east Morocco. The field of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally spent a night in the middle of the desert as part of the traditional marathon stage. "Finding yourself alone with the other drivers and riders in magical places is the very essence of rally raids", says **Mathieu Beaumel**, **Nasser Al-Attiyah**'s French co-driver. Neither the howling gales nor the sandstorm that battered the bivouac managed to curb their enthusiasm. "This is also part of rally raids", quips Frenchman **Éric Croquelois**.

Not everyone can afford to rest, however, as some had to work hard to repair their bruised machines. Spaniard **Dani Solà**, for example, spent some time toiling away to change the suspension of his side-by-side. The drivers and riders then received the road book for the next stage. Most of them congregated inside a large tent with tables and chairs. Competitors gathered together with their fellow countrymen to work together. Meanwhile, the Hotel Xaluca staff—the support base of the rally—had finished preparing dinner. It was like manna from heaven for the participants, who had to wake up around 5:30 am to tackle the 205.27 km special standing between them and the bivouac.

STORY OF THE DAY. Coma, Casteu, Al-Attiyah: a work of heart

Some men have lost count of all the rally raids they have taken part in, their names part of the history of the sport. Frenchman **David Casteu**, Spaniard **Marc Coma** and Qatari **Nasser Al-Attiyah** have all travelled to the Afriquia Merzouga Rally this week, but for wildly different reasons. The three-time Dakar winner wanted to try his hand at side-by-side racing. "It's an excellent opportunity to learn to drive this machine", he explains. "We're laying the groundwork for the future. I might start the Dakar in a side-by-side some day!" Frenchman **David Casteu** no longer races, but his experience makes him a valuable asset for Sherco, where he now works as team manager: "Rally raids made me the way I am. It's only logical for me to support riders and do my bit for the future of rally raids." It is the same passion that drives Spanish five-time Dakar champion Marc Coma. At the Afriquia Merzouga Rally, he is responsible for participants in the KTM Ultimate Race, a challenge for fans of the Austrian maker. "Apart from doling out advice, it's essential to make them understand how important it is to avoid hubris in rally raids, how you never stop learning new things and how you should always face the challenges ahead of you prudently." Competitors who dream of following in their footsteps could do worse than to listen to his wise words.

HEARD IN THE BIVOUAC

Sébastien Lagut (FRA, Nomade Racing, KTM): "So far, so good! This is my first rally, so it's all about seeing what it's like. But I'm having a blast. When you love riding, racing through these vast landscapes is simply amazing. I hope to finish the Afriquia Merzouga Rally and get a bit closer to starting the Dakar."

Aravind Prabhakar (IND, Sherco TVS Rally Factory): "This is my second Afriquia Merzouga Rally. My main goal here is to gain more experience navigating and to continue learning how the Dakar works. I've already taken part in the Dakar and am very eager to start the next edition. As part of my preparation, it's really awesome to be here, live an amazing experience and learn while having lots of fun."

THE MORE YOU KNOW... The environmental footprint of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally is close to nil!

The Afriquia Merzouga Rally has been working to minimise its environmental footprint for several years now. An impact assessment carried out last year demonstrated and endorsed a series of initiatives. Together with Afriquia, the Moroccan fuel distribution leader, the rally has pledged to recover all the used oil. Furthermore, most documents issued by the organisation are now provided in digital format. A Telegram channel lets competitors and their companions download all these documents to their smartphones as soon as they are issued. Finally, all the money from claims lodged during the competition is invested into social projects benefiting the local population.

PROGRAMME: Stage 5: a hectic start!

The 10th edition of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally will stay true to the tradition with a mass start planned for the final stage. The side-by-side drivers will start first, followed by the quad riders and bikers. Stage 5, known as the "Grand Prix of the Dunes", will pit the competitors against an extremely complicated 48.30 km special on the dunes of Erg Chebbi. Once the stage is over, it will be time for the participants to unwind and look back on this week of racing with a shedload of great memories.

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

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

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