

Merzouga, 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2018

## AFRIQUIA MERZOUGA RALLY A Sunday right on track!

**After an intense morning dominated by the technical scrutineering, the field of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally hit the tracks for the first time for the free practice session and the prologue. The race proper starts tomorrow with a navigation-heavy stage.**

### **Key points:**

- Competitors spent the morning going through technical and administrative scrutineering
- Participants used the free practice session and the prologue to rev up their engines
- A total of 123 competitors —80 bikers, 12 quad riders and 31 side-by-side buggies— will take part in the ninth edition

The cool temperatures of Sunday morning soon gave way to the spring heat at the Toumbouctou Hotel, where the Afriquia Merzouga Rally has set up its bivouac. After their first footsteps on the sand, the competitors spent the morning going through administrative and technical scrutineering, a precondition to taking part in the race. "I'm thrilled to be here, the landscapes are stunning", says Pascal Pouguet. The 55-year-old biker, a regular fixture in the French amateur championship, is getting his first taste of rally raids shortly after becoming a grandfather. "The entire organisation team is putting its heart and soul into setting the perfect stage for us", explains the lucky winner of the yearly contest run by the French *Enduro Mag* magazine after diving into the intricacies of navigation.

### **"The Afriquia Merzouga Rally is a real family"**

"We're standing at the feet of the dunes, the best place to ride and tweak a quad", adds Axel Dutrie, racing the Afriquia Merzouga Rally for the first time after three Dakar starts. "The sand around here's very soft, we'll have to be careful", he continues.

The atmosphere among the competitors is crackling with anticipation. One of them is Camelia Liparoti, who is busy applying the final touches to her wholly pink Side-by-Side (halfway between a quad and a buggy). "I first raced in this category in last year's Afriquia Merzouga Rally", she points out. "It's awesome to be back and see the other competitors and organisers again... The Afriquia Merzouga Rally is a real family!"

Even though the competitors are relaxed, the five-day race promises to be intense. "It's a technical rally with many dune sections", stresses race founder Edo Mossi. "Amateurs will be thrown into the deep end right away!" Evening courses will be given to help them hone their navigational skills and teach them how to react to unexpected situations.

### **FIGURE OF THE DAY. 123**

A total of 123 competitors —80 bikers, 12 quad riders and 31 side-by-side buggies— will take part in this year's edition of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally.

### **Q&A. What does it take to be a good navigator?**

Afriquia Merzouga Rally founder Edo Mossi is giving a navigation course on Sunday: "Compared with enduro, the main difference lies in the need to plan far ahead —several kilometres ahead. It is hard to ride and keep an eye on the road book at the same time while avoiding any mistakes. It is a good idea to try and put yourself in the shoes of the organisers to understand what they were thinking when they designed the road book. You also need to work hard. There's only one way to pull it off: training and entering rallies again and again!"

### **FOCUS ON... Worldwide coverage**

The Afriquia Merzouga Rally inspires lots of people during the entire week of racing, but also TV viewers all over the world. Footage of the rally will be broadcast in 190 countries. Morocco's leading channel, 2M, is offering daily coverage for the first time. The Afriquia Merzouga Rally is also making its debut in the Netherlands (RTL7), Portugal (RTP), Russia (Match TV) and Argentina (EIDoce). Fans can also get a blow-by-blow account of the rally on its website ([merzougarally.com](http://merzougarally.com)) and social network accounts (@merzougarally on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram).

### **TOMORROW'S PROGRAMME. Watch out!**

Monday's 206.71 km opening stage consists of two relatively easy loops, but the competitors will see their navigational skills put to the test. Each half of the stage features a particularly fiendish 11 km section. Bikers will start alongside the Side-by-Side buggies for the first kilometre, ramping up the excitement for the entire field!

For more information, visit the rally's web site: [www.merzougarally.com](http://www.merzougarally.com)

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