

## AFRIQUIA MERZOUGA RALLY Joan Barreda makes it two!

Competitors in the Afriquia Merzouga Rally faced a 241.1 km course with dunes as far as the eye can see today. The queen stage took bikers, quad riders and Side by Side drivers to the heart of the desert. The third day of racing was also the first half of the marathon stage, which means the competitors will have to go without their assistance crews this evening. Spaniard Joan Barreda claimed his second stage win and padded his lead in the general classification. Gary Aldington (Yamaha) and Ruben Faria (Can-Am) won in the quad and SxS categories.

### Key points:

- A highly technical 241.1 km stage
- Today was a marathon stage, which leaves competitors without their assistance crews tonight
- Stage 1 winner Joan Barreda won the motorbike stage and increased his margin in the general classification
- Brit Gary Aldington (Yamaha) claimed the quad race, but Frenchman Axel Dutrie (Yamaha) defended his overall lead
- Ruben Faria (Can-Am) won the SxS stage and remains in control of the category.
- The competitors will see their assistance crews again after 233 km of racing tomorrow.

"Bring it on", they say. Their enthusiasm burning as bright as ever, the competitors took off for the queen stage of the ninth Afriquia Merzouga Rally in the early hours this morning. It was another technically complex day in the heart of the dunes in southern Morocco. A 63 km liaison took the participants to the start of the 241.1 km special. A seemingly never-ending sea of dunes awaited. The super-soft dunes at the start gave way to those in the Rissani and Chebbi ergs before the sandy areas of the Fezzou region and, towards the end, the Ouzina erg prior to reaching the bivouac set up in the middle of the desert.

This is what the first half of the marathon stage looked like. Competitors will be unable to call upon their assistance crews at the bivouac. "It forces you to be extra careful during the day to avoid mechanical problems, as well as staying as calm as possible in the evening", points out Loïc Minaudier, racing in his first Afriquia Merzouga Rally after completing his third Dakar in January. The favourites, on the other hand, kept pushing hard.

Joan Barreda (Honda) grabbed a repeat win after claiming the opening stage on Monday. The Spaniard, a 20-time stage winner in the Dakar, padded his lead in the general classification. Just like yesterday, Pablo Quintanilla (Husqvarna) posted the second fastest time, but he is still in third place in the overall, right behind Kevin Benavides (Honda), who finished third today. Former Dakar biker Ruben Faria expanded his overall lead with another victory in the SxS race. Finally, Brit Gary Aldington is the provisional winner of the quad stage, but victory could end up going to the race leader, Frenchman Axel Dutrie (Yamaha). Dutrie lost 20-odd minutes while helping out an amateur rider, but race officials could review his case during the evening. Now, all the riders are focused on the next stage, which is also the penultimate one of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally.

### PROVISIONAL STAGE 3 CLASSIFICATION: MOTORBIKES

- 1- Joan Barreda (Honda) 3 h 23'42"
- 2- Pablo Quintanilla (Husqvarna) + 8'59"
- 3- Kevin Benavides (Honda) + 9'15"
- 4- Toby Price (KTM) + 10'49"
- 5- Franco Caimi (Yamaha) + 11'21"

### QUADS

- 1- Gary Aldington (Yamaha) 4 h 36'53"
- 2- Jérémy Forestier (Yamaha) + 3'21"
- 3- Axel Dutrie (Yamaha)\* + 18'42"

### SIDE BY SIDE

- 1- Ruben Faria (Can-Am) en 4 h 07'04"
- 2- Bruno Varela (Can-Am) + 7'01"
- 3- Casey Curie (Can-Am) + 24'41"

### PROVISIONAL GENERAL CLASSIFICATION AFTER STAGE 3: MOTORBIKES

- 1- Joan Barreda (Honda) 9 h 36'09"
- 2- Kevin Benavides (Honda) + 12'51"
- 3- Pablo Quintanilla (Husqvarna) + 13'52"
- 4- Franco Caimi (Yamaha) + 18'22"
- 5- Toby Price (KTM) + 20'17"

### QUADS

- 1- Axel Dutrie (Yamaha) 13 h 59'09"
- 2- Jérémy Forestier (Yamaha) + 1 h 27'00"
- 3- Gary Aldington (Yamaha) + 1 h 49'04"

### SIDE BY SIDE

- 1- Ruben Faria (Can-Am) 12 h 19'41"
- 2- Bruno Varela (Can-Am) + 14'50"
- 3- Casey Curie (Can-Am) + 20'38"

### QUOTES

**Joan Barreda (Honda, 1<sup>st</sup>):** "It was a fantastic day. I opened the road and pushed really hard to gain time. In the second part of the special there was a section littered with stones. I took a tumble, but it was nothing serious, thankfully. I was able to keep going at the same pace until the finish. Now it's time to defend my lead, but I'm pleased with the work of the entire team."

**Pablo Quintanilla (Husqvarna, 2<sup>nd</sup>):** "It was a very hard and technical stage, even tricky in certain places. For example, some sections were full of stones, so we had to be careful. I lost some time in a *rió*, but the bike is still in good shape. I need to keep it up from tomorrow."

**Kevin Benavides (Honda, 3<sup>rd</sup>):** "Navigating was really hard today, but I had good feelings. I'm sure I gained some time today."

**Toby Price (KTM, 4<sup>th</sup>):** "It was a complicated day in which we needed to navigate very carefully. I lost some time, unfortunately, but I'm still in the mix. The Honda riders are doing great in this rally, which makes things interesting for the rest of us. During the marathon stage you don't get to sleep in a 4-star hotel, but it brings us all together in a great atmosphere."

**Axel Dutrie (quads, Yamaha, 3<sup>rd</sup>):** "It was a good day. I stopped for about 20 minutes to help a biker who'd suffered an accident. When you see someone on the ground, you don't even entertain the thought of leaving him behind, it's normal to help. I hope we'll get a cool night and be able to relax tonight. Today was the hottest days since the start of the rally."

### TOMORROW'S PROGRAMME. Back to the Toumbouctou Hotel!

The penultimate stage of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally will take the competitors back to the bivouac at the Toumbouctou Hotel. The day will start with a 36 km liaison where participants can enjoy the amazing views. The 233 km special puts the spotlight on the dunes before a section on fast tracks that goes all the way to Errachidia. Finally, a maze of tracks will put the competitors' navigational skills to the test. They will then be able to link up with their assistance crews and get ready for the closing stage of the Afriquia Merzouga Rally with peace of mind.

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

**Press contact**

**Maria Guidotti**

[maria@mariaguidotti.com](mailto:maria@mariaguidotti.com) / [pressedakar@aso.fr](mailto:pressedakar@aso.fr)