

Nasser Al-Attiyah storms to victory at Dakar Rally prologue



Three-time champion secures top spot on the podium in the car category.

Racing got underway today at the 2022 Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia and it was Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah who lay down an early marker in the car race with victory in the 19km prologue, while Australia's Daniel Sanders took first place in the bike category. Here is all you need to know:

- A three-time winner of the toughest race on the planet, Al-Attiyah set the early pace in the first competitive action of the 2022 Dakar Rally, finishing 12 seconds ahead of Carlos Sainz in the Jeddah-Ha'il prologue.
- A winner in 2011, 2015 and 2019, Al-Attiyah will now open tomorrow's 334km loop stage around the Ha'il bivouac.
- Al-Attiyah said: "It was a short stage today. I'm quite happy to win because it's good for our starting position tomorrow. I'm happy with the performance of our new car. The team's hard work is helping us a lot."
- Nine-time World Rally champion Sébastien Loeb kicked off his first Dakar alongside new navigator Fabian Lurquin in impressive fashion, setting the fifth-fastest time of the day, 37s adrift of Al-Attiyah.
- 14-time champion Stéphane Peterhansel was 14th, with Audi team-mate Mattias Ekström one place further behind.
- Elsewhere in the car category, Laia Sanz finished 2m40s behind stage winner Al-Attiyah as she takes to the wheel at the Dakar for the first time. The Spaniard holds the incredible record of completing all 11 editions she raced on a bike and is now looking to bring her MINI ALL4 Racing to the finish line in Jeddah on January 14.

- Sanz said: "It was a good prologue stage for us. The feeling was good throughout. We stayed really calm. Maybe we could have pushed a bit more, but it was the first day. Tomorrow starts the real race and we will see what our base level is."

- In the bike contest, last year's top rookie Sanders led the way for GasGas, finishing a full minute ahead of Pablo Quintanilla.

- Sanders, 27, said: "It was a pretty fast day. The prologue went really clean for me. It's great to be back here in Saudi Arabia and racing on this terrain again. At the moment I'm leading so that's good. I'm excited to carry on and today was good to shake off some nerves."

- Sanders was joined in the top five by KTM Factory Racing duo Kevin Benavides (fourth) of Argentina and Austria's Matthias Walkner (fifth). Former champion Sam Sunderland was seventh, while two-time winner Toby Price was one place further back in eighth.

Benavides said: "It's never easy to get started at the Dakar. There are always some nerves and lots of emotion. I was feeling a bit rigid at the beginning, but I managed to relax as I got into the stage."

- Serial truck race winners Team Kamaz Master are well set up after the prologue, with four-time Dakar champion Eduard Nikolaev leading the way with victory on Saturday. The Russian was closely followed by his three team-mates, with Dmitry Sotnikov in second, Andrey Karginov in third and Anton Shibalov claimed fourth.

Sotnikov said: "The last Dakar was great for us, the team worked together so well to get us that victory. Now we've built a new truck so that brings with it a fresh challenge. We've tested the new truck a lot, but in Russia we don't have the same terrain as we find at the Dakar. Our aim is to keep the team in first position."

- In the Lightweight Vehicles category, America's Seth Quintero made the perfect start as he looks to become the rally's youngest-ever overall category winner.

- Having made history with the Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team in last year's race by becoming the youngest-ever stage winner, Quintero edged out team-mate Andreas Mikkelsen to claim victory in the prologue. Belgium's Guillaume De Mevius finished in fourth, while Cristina Gutiérrez was sixth.

Quintero, 19, said: "The prologue went really well. We ended up catching a bit of traffic, but overall a good start to the rally. Now I can't wait for the rest of it."

Top three overall results in each category

Car

1. Nasser Al-Attiyah (QAT) Toyota Gazoo Racing 10m56s
2. Carlos Sainz (ESP) Team Audi Sport +00:12
3. Brian Baragwanath (ZAF) Century Racing +00:36

Bike

1. Daniel Sanders (AUS) Gas Gas 55m30s
2. Pablo Quintanilla (CHL) Honda Team 2022 +01:00
3. Ross Branch (BWA) Yamaha Rally Team +01:55

Truck

1. Eduard Nikolaev (RUS) Kamaz Master 13m01s
2. Dmitry Sotnikov (RUS) Kamaz Master +00:07
3. Andrey Karginov (RUS) Kamaz Master +00:15

Lightweight Prototype

1. Seth Quintero (USA) Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team 13m07s
2. Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR) Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team +00:03
3. Francisco Lopez Contardo (CHL) EKS - South Racing +00:05

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Guillaume de Mevius (BEL) of Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team races during the prologue stage of Rally Dakar2022 from Jeddah to Hail, Saudi Arabia on January 01, 2022



Francisco Chaleco Lopez (CHL) of CAN-AM Factory South Racing races during the prologue stage of Rally Dakar2022 from Jeddah to Hail, Saudi Arabia on January 01, 2022

Giniel De Villiers (ZAF) of Toyota Gazoo Racing races during the prologue stage of Rally Dakar2022 from Jeddah to Hail, Saudi Arabia on January 01, 2022



Andrey Karginov (RUS) of Team KAMAZ-Master races during the prologue stage of Rally Dakar2022 from Jeddah to Hail, Saudi Arabia on January 01, 2022

Mattias Ekstrom (SWE) of Team Audi Sport races during the prologue stage of Rally Dakar2022 from Jeddah to Hail, Saudi Arabia on January 01, 2022



Cristina Gutierrez (ESP) of Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team races during the prologue stage of Rally Dakar2022 from Jeddah to Hail, Saudi Arabia on January 01, 2022

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