



Serial winners rise up the rankings as the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge hits the home straight



(clockwise) Nasser Al-Attiyah, Lucas Moraes, Laia Sanz and Dania Akeel © Kin Marcin/Red Bull Content Pool

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Just a month since the conclusion of the [2024 Dakar Rally](#) and the best in the business are back in the desert hammering down the accelerator. At the midway point of the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (ADDC) we have seen a pair of multiple Dakar champions fighting for control in the dunes of the Liwa Desert. Let's check in on the Ultimate and Challenger classes to see who has got their noses in front at the midway point of the rally...

Cruising to victory on the Prologue Stage was five-time Dakar winner [Nasser Al-Attiyah](#). Al-Attiyah is looking at home in his Prodrive Hunter in Abu Dhabi. Alongside new co-driver **Édouard Boulanger** there was a win on Stage One followed by second place on Stage Two to give the Qatari an advantage of 8m31s at the front of the Ultimate class with three stages remaining.

"We had a very good stage today. I was driving well and Édouard was doing a great job so no problems. We opened all the way and nobody caught us." – **Nasser Al-Attiyah**

It's been a consistent run so far from Toyota Gazoo Racing's [Lucas Moraes](#). The Brazilian has finished fourth on the Prologue, Stage One and Stage Two. This steady string of results have placed the GR DKR Hilux driver and his co-driver **Armand Monleon** as runners-up overall after three days of racing.

"It was a really hard stage today. The last 50km was Level 3 dunes, very soft. My lack of experience became quite clear. There was one dune that we tried twice to climb and we couldn't do it." – **Lucas Moraes**

Sneaking up towards the overall podium places is Moraes's fellow Toyota Gazoo Racing driver [Seth Quintero](#). The 21-year-old is now just two minutes off the Ultimate podium after scoring the third fastest time on Stage Two alongside co-driver [Dennis Zenz](#).

"Today was good for us and we ended up in P3. Our result today helps us out for the overall." – **Seth Quintero**

The news was not so good today for [Guillaume de Mevius](#) who was forced to retire from the ADDC after his Toyota Hilux Overdrive endured a rough landing at the base of a dune on Stage Two. We hope to see Dakar runner-up De Mevius and co-driver **Xavier Panseri** back in action soon.

In the Challenger category it has been a masterclass from two-time Dakar Rally winner [Austin 'AJ' Jones](#). The American alongside co-driver **Oriol Mena** has taken victory on all three opening days of the ADDC in his Can-Am Maverick.

"We pushed pretty hard today and took some risks, but it never really got too scary. The stage was really nice and the pace was a bit faster than what had come before. We got another stage win so that's always good." – **Austin Jones**

Jones's fellow Can-Am driver [Rokas Baciūška](#) is currently sitting second overall, six minutes off the race lead. Baciūška and co-driver **Oriol Vidal** have

finished second on the first long, desert stages held at the ADDC.

Team BBR drivers [Dania Akeel](#) and [Laia Sanz](#) are both still in the mix to bring their Taurus T3 Max machines onto the Challenger podium. Akeel and co-driver **Stéphane Duplé** are less than half a minute off third place overall. Meanwhile, Sanz and co-driver **Maurizio Gerini** are currently in fifth place in the Challenger race. Sanz has wasted no time in adapting to her Taurus T3 Max and even posted Stage One's third fastest time.

It's been a tough opening to the ADDC for reigning Dakar champion of the Challenger class, [Cristina Gutiérrez](#). Various issues have put Gutiérrez and co-driver **Pablo Moreno** out of contention for the win, but they're determined to show their true level of performance on the three remaining stages.

"It's been a frustrating beginning to this rally because of some issues that we've had. We want to be competitive on the stages that we have left here in Abu Dhabi." – **Cristina Gutiérrez**

With nearly 700 kilometres still to race at the 33rd edition of the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge there's still plenty of scope for moves up and down the leaderboard before the chequered flag flies in Abu Dhabi City on Saturday, March 2. Three long stages through the open desert of the Mzeer'ah region remain before the final podium places are decided and those precious World Rally-Rally Championship points are handed out.

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Austin Jones © Kin Marcin/Red Bull Content Pool



Dania Akeel © Kin Marcin/Red Bull Content Pool



Cristina Gutiérrez © Kin Marcin/Red Bull Content Pool



Laia Sanz © Kin Marcin/Red Bull Content Pool

QUOTES

Nasser Al-Attiyah: "We had a very good stage today. I was driving well and Édouard was doing a great job so no problems. We opened all the way and nobody caught us. If we can finish inside the Top 3 on each stage we will be fine."

Lucas Moraes: "It was a really hard stage today. The last 50km was Level 3 dunes, very soft. My lack of experience became quite clear. There was one dune that we tried twice to climb and we couldn't do it. We lost a bunch of time there, but still we brought ourselves to the finish."

Seth Quintero: "Today was good for us and we ended up in P3. I was riding with (Guerlain) Chicherit for most of the day and we were having some fun."

Our result today helps us out for the overall.”

Austin Jones: “It was a really good day for us again today. We pushed pretty hard today and took some risks, but it never really got too scary. The stage was really nice and the pace was a bit faster than what had come before. We got another stage win so that’s always good.”

Cristina Gutiérrez: “It’s been a frustrating beginning to this rally because of some issues that we’ve had. We want to be competitive on the stages that we have left here in Abu Dhabi.”

MEDIA INFO

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Nasser Al-Attiyah’s co-driver Mathieu Baumel and other navigation experts decode the Dakar Rally’s roadbook. Watch [here](#)

Cristina Gutiérrez and rookie Tobias Ebster give us the lowdown on how to survive the all-new 48-hour Chrono Stage. Watch [here](#)

Seth Quintero, Daniel Sanders and Dania Akeel share their Dakar experience. Watch [here](#)

Biker brothers Kevin and Luciano Benavides talk about the pros and cons of racing against your family at the Dakar. Watch [here](#)

Nasser Al-Attiyah and Carlos Sainz are Dakar legends, with a total of eight wins between them. Taking a break from the dunes, they join In the Dust to share a unique insight. Watch [here](#)

Delve into the lives of Dakar bike race winners Toby Price and Sam Sunderland away from the desert and find out what keeps them coming back for more. Watch [here](#)

