



Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge dominated by Dakar champions



(clockwise) Andrea & Stéphane Peterhansel, Cyril Despres, Sam Sunderland, Luciano Benavides © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool

Thursday, April 4

History has been made at the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge with [Stéphane and Andrea Peterhansel \(FRA/GER\)](#) the first married couple team to take an overall win at the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Rallies. There was further success for the Red Bull Desert Wings squad at the five-stage rally with wins for [Sam Sunderland \(GBR\)](#) and [Fahad Al Musallam \(KUW\)](#) in the bike and quad contests respectively.

This was the first time Stéphane and Andrea had teamed up to race in the car class of a cross-country rally. They had enjoyed success in side-by-side (SxS) racing previously, but this was a whole new ball game.

"Our strategy was to stay safe and we never got stuck in the dunes on any of the five days. We had no technical problems and we never lost the road." – **Stéphane Peterhansel**

It was soon apparent in the deserts of Abu Dhabi that Stéphane's 13 [Dakar Rally](#) wins and Andrea's own wealth of offroad racing experience were going to stand the couple in good stead. With Stéphane at the wheel and Andrea giving pace notes, they hit the front following the second of five desert stages. While the chasing pack faltered, the winning duo kept their MINI John Cooper Works Rally on the right track and took the chequered flag at the Yas Marina Circuit.

"It was a huge experience and we're so happy to share this victory together. Thanks to the team and to everybody who brought us to this moment." – **Andrea Peterhansel**

Watch how to flow over the Abu Dhabi dunes [here](#)

Underlining the extreme difficulty of the contest were the problems that beset Dakar regulars [Cyril Despres \(FRA\)](#) and [Kuba Przygonski \(POL\)](#). Despite winning the first stage, things took a turn for the worse for Despres and co-driver **Dani Oliveras (ESP)** after that early success. A series of stoppages in the soft sand for their MINI John Cooper Works Buggy on the remaining stages saw the pair eventually finish the rally eighth overall.

"After winning the first stage things were looking good. But on day two our problems started with a wheel off the rim and the hydraulic jack getting blocked." – **Cyril Despres**

Przygonski and his co-driver **Timo Gottschalk (GER)** were in the hunt for victory after setting the fastest time on stage three. However, disaster struck at the beginning of day four as they failed to start the stage due mechanical issues with their MINI Buggy.

There were no such problems for bike race winner Sunderland who held his lead from start to finish of the 1,300-kilometre course. The 2017 Dakar champion was looking back to his best as the tore over the dunes and victory rarely looked in doubt.

"I'm really happy with the job that was done all week by the team and my own performance. It's a great start to the World Championship." – **Sam Sunderland**

Sunderland was followed home by fellow Red Bull KTM Factory Team biker [Luciano Benavides \(ARG\)](#). The runners-up finish for the young Argentinian rider is the first FIM Cross-Country Rallies Championship podium of his career and a moment to cherish.

"The team got a one-two finish so this is really good for us. I'm so happy and now it's time to enjoy a little bit." – **Luciano Benavides**

Ride the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge with the KTM team [here](#)

Elsewhere on the bikes, there were Top 10 finishes for [Mohammed Jaffar \(KUW\)](#) and [Mohammed Balooshi \(UAE\)](#) to celebrate, while [Anastasiya Nifontova \(RUS\)](#) was the highest

place female biker – finishing an impressive 14th overall.

Two stage wins out of five helped [Fahad Al Musallam \(KUW\)](#) to victory in the quad contest. Al Musallam was in a determined mood all week as he dug deep to hold off the challenge of former Dakar champion Rafal Sonik (POL).

With three category wins across cars, bikes and quads it looks like the Red Bull Desert Wings squad have got plenty more success stories lined up for 2019 cross-country season.

You're receiving this newsletter because you're subscribed to the [Red Bull Desert Wings newsletter](#), our distribution service for inside stories covering our Red Bull rally-raid athletes.

Find all clips, newscuts, still images, and stories covering the 2019 Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge [here](#)

Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge: Selected Final Results

Cars

1. **S. Peterhansel (FRA)/A. Peterhansel** MINI Rally 18h03m45s
2. K. Al Qassimi (UAE)/ X. Panseri (FRA) Peugeot 3008 DKR +08m48s
3. A. Domzala (POL)/M. Marton (POL) Toyota Hilux +46m16s
8. **C. Despres (FRA)/ D. Oliveras (ESP)** MINI Buggy +04h08m34s

Bikes

1. **S. Sunderland (GBR)** KTM 17h46m42s
2. **L. Benavides (ARG)** KTM +08m20
3. J. Cornejo (CHI) Honda +09m59s
7. **M. Mesari Jaffar (KUW)** KTM +01h37m06s
9. **M. Al Balooshi (UAE)** KTM +01h45m54s
14. **A. Nifontova (RUS)** Husqvarna +08h19m11s

Quads

1. **F. Al Musallam (KUW)** Yamaha 21h51m28s
2. R. Sonik (POL) Yamaha +01m13s
3. A. Maksimov (RUS) Yamaha +05m52s



Stéphane & Andrea Peterhansel © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool



Kuba Przygonski © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool



Cyril Despres © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool



Sam Sunderland © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool



Luciano Benavides © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool



Mohammed Jaffar © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool



Mohammed Balooshi © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool

Anastasiya Nifontova © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool

Fahad Al Musallam © Naim Chidiac/Red Bull Content Pool

Quotes

Stéphane Peterhansel: “The expectation beforehand was not to win the race. After the first day we saw that things were all going OK. Then when we took the lead on the second day we thought that we should try and keep it. Our strategy was to stay safe and we never got stuck in the dunes on any of the five days. We had no technical problems and we never lost the road. It’s a great feeling because this is the first time we did a race in a real racing car together and we won the race.”

Andrea Peterhansel: “The result is much better than we ever expected. I was unwell before the race so the idea was to just see how we go. Then as each day passed I was able to get more and more confident. We saw many cars having big problems in the dunes, but for us things all went very smoothly. It was a tough race, we had sandstorms that effected visibility as well as the usual problems you get racing in the desert. I always knew Stéphane was a great driver, but to be in the car and see how he reacts to different situations was really something. Day by day we progressed and in the end it was good enough to win the race. It was a huge experience and we’re so happy to share this victory together. Thanks to the team and to everybody who brought us to this moment.”

Cyril Despres: “I tried to do my best, but it was not a good race for us. After winning the first stage things were looking good. But on day two our problems started with a wheel off the rim and the hydraulic jack getting blocked. This destroyed the possibility of a good result and that’s always frustrating.”

Kuba Przygonski: “It was a complicated race for us. We had a good rhythm and won two stages, nearly three. We were having a good time, Timo and me, and learning how to get the most out of the buggy. We need to keep working on the buggy to make it more reliable.”

Sam Sunderland: “We had our last stage strategy and it was important for me to execute the plan. The stage started in the dunes and then got faster and faster. Then I was able to ease off to the finish. I’m really happy with the job that was done all week by the team and my own performance. It’s a great start to the World Championship.”

Luciano Benavides: “It’s been an incredible day for me. I knew I had to push a lot to make the second place. I was pushing, but also aware I needed to stay on the bike. The bike was feeling good so I went on the attack. The team got a one-two finish so this is really good for us. I’m so happy and now it’s time to enjoy a little bit.”

Media Info

Find all clips, newscuts, still images, and stories covering the 2019 Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge [here](#)

Get stuck into the dunes with our Dune Days I Rally Raid Vlog S1 – Episode 6 [“What’s up at the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge?”](#)

Watch how to flow over the Abu Dhabi dunes [here](#)

Ride the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge with the KTM team [here](#)

Watch all of our Dakar Daily episodes on Red Bull TV, and get the full story of the 2019 Dakar Rally:

www.redbull.com/int-en/tv/live/AP-1XE964JH91W11/dakar-rally

Find all interviews, news cuts, still images, and stories covering the 2019 Dakar Rally here:

www.redbullcontentpool.com/dakar

Watch great content on the new [Red Bull Motorsports YouTube channel](#).

SOCIAL MEDIA

[Red Bull Motorsport Instagram](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Twitter](#) / [Desert Wings Instagram](#)

Contact

Red Bull Motorsports Communications

Christine Fial

Media@redbullmotorsports.com

