



Stage 1: Casteu's big bluff & Roma's double in Cordoba

Behind the handlebars of a brand new 450cc, David Casteu has thrown the proverbial cat amongst the pigeons on the first stage of the Dakar. He has taken the lead in the general standings with the day's best time in front of the two favourites for outright victory, Cyril Despres and Marc Coma. In the car race, Joan "Nani" Roma picked up the second stage victory of his career in the car category, in Cordoba, like in 2009. He is someone always full of surprises; like setting up his own team for instance, with French constructor Sherco, grabbing the opportunity thrown up by the switch over to 450cc for all the competitors in the bike race in the near future. David Casteu, often arbitrator in proceedings between Cyril Despres and Marc Coma, and 2nd in the Dakar in 2007 and 4th in 2009, has chosen to challenge his rivals on a newly designed and less powerful bike. The road is still long, but this bold decision has already been rewarded on the first special stage of the 2010 edition, in which the rider from Nice scored the day's best time, 3" ahead of Cyril Despres, and 12" in front of title holder Marc Coma. The gaps are small in light of what still awaits them, but this stage win is symbolically significant for brave David.

In the early hours of the morning, a final conversation between Casteu and his mechanic convinced him to try and make an impact between Colon and Cordoba. Over the 168 kilometres remaining to be covered once the stage had been shortened due to flooding at the start of the special, the eternal outsider was true to his sole guiding principle: "Attack, attack, attack". In the end, Casteu won the 2nd special stage of his career on the Dakar, with the satisfaction of handing out a first defeat to the KTM 690cc riders. In the series of confrontations between big and small that are on the menu, David Frégné, on his Yamaha 450cc, was more discrete than Casteu, finishing in 6th position in the day's standings, almost three minutes off the lead. For the return of Aprilia to the Dakar, Francisco Lopez, also riding a 450cc, took fifth place, 2'42" behind Casteu, but also nearly a minute behind Jordi Viladoms, who finished in fourth.

After having collected 12 stage victories on a bike, Joan "Nani" Roma also marked the day with a second victory in his category, by winning the day's special stage. For the former winner of the bike category (2004), the day's performance has added flavour, one year after having put in the best time in the special stage finishing in Cordoba. At the time, it was one of the few good days for the Mitsubishi clan, the team with which he started his second career. This time, Roma has joined Team BMW X-Raid with team-mate Stéphane Peterhansel and spent several weeks optimising the potential of the X3 through many adjustments. The success enjoyed at the end of this 199 km special stage is therefore a reward for hard work and a sign of renewal. Indeed, the man they will now call the "King of Cordoba" also pulled out all the stops to take control of the general standings: he leads Carlos Sainz by 2'07". BMW's satisfaction does not end there: Stéphane Peterhansel took third place, 2'50" behind the leader.

In spite of Roma's sparkling victory, the result of the first stage is not alarming for rivals Volkswagen, because Nasser Al Attiyah (3'29" behind the leader) and Giniel De Villiers (4'31" behind) make up the rest of the Top 5. Furthermore, it is already becoming evident that reliability and mechanical problems will have their role to play throughout the race. Team X-Raid encountered their first mishaps when Guerlain Chicherit was halted by engine problems thirty kilometres from the finishing line.

source: www.dakar.com