



Stage 11: Bmw Day On The Dakar

The Dakar bid Chile farewell after 7 special stages and said hello again to Argentina for a tough home straight leading to Buenos Aires. In the bike race, a navigation error put a halt to the fine series of triumphs by Marc Coma. Instead, Dutchman Frans Verhoeven was victorious, offering BMW an unexpected win on the rally. Cyril Despres keeps hold of the lead in the general standings. In the car race, Guerlain Chicherit renewed acquaintance with victory 4 years after his last triumph. The battle is still fierce between Sainz and Al Attiyah. The Spaniard now only leads the second placed driver by 4'28.

After a very early awakening followed by a journey through the Andes via the Paso Libertadores pass, at an altitude of 3500 m, the Dakar's bikers tackled a 220-km special similar to the previous day's stage: fast along winding tracks and for the most part downhill. In these conditions, with Marc Coma opening the road, it was not unreasonable to predict another success for the Catalan. However, a bad navigation mistake put paid to that. After 13 km he carried on straight ahead instead of turning right, meaning he rode for 3 km in one direction, then 3 km in the other before rejoining the correct route, losing around a dozen minutes to the quickest riders at CP1 (after 51 km). The competitors just behind him made the same mistake, but since they saw the Spaniard backtracking, they were able to limit the damage.

The ninth biker to start this morning, American Jonah Street, who has been rather discreet since the beginning of the rally (never featuring in the top 5 of a special), did not make the same directional error. As a result, he achieved the best time at CP1 but had a lead of only 7 seconds over the whirlwind Frans Verhoeven on his BMW who is finishing the rally in a much better way than he started. This duel carried on right until the finishing line. In the end, it was Verhoeven who was victorious by 3 tiny seconds. The 'Flying Dutchman' picked up his 3rd stage win on the Dakar after his successes in Puerto Madryn and Copiapo last year. This victory could go a long way to helping the BMW rider forget the setbacks he suffered during the first two stages. For statistics fans, the last victory by a BMW bike on the Dakar dates back to 2001, at a time when a certain Cyril Despres won in Tambacounda.

Pal Anders Ullevalseter was the big winner of the day in his quest for a place on the podium. The Norwegian finished in 4th place on the day, behind Alain Duclos, strengthening his 2nd place in the general standings with a lead that now stands at 2'40 over Lopez and more importantly almost 10' over Rodrigues, who encountered plenty of navigational problems. Marc Coma eventually finished the day more than 5' behind the stage winner. The leader in the general standings, Cyril Despres, once again did the necessary to protect his lead. The Frenchman, on a KTM, maintains a 1 hour 20 minute lead over Ullevalseter.

In the car category, the exciting duel for overall victory between Carlos Sainz and

Nasser Al Attiyah continued. Speed was the order of the day, though care was necessary in breath-taking settings. After Sainz's victory yesterday, the complexion of the race had changed somewhat, since the Spaniard today opened the road with his Qatari rival three cars behind. An experienced rally driver, El Matador boasted a lead of 13" over his team-mate at CP1. The BMW drivers were hardly concerned by this battle and so had a field day on the mountain tracks in the foothills of the Andes. Guerlain Chicherit put in the best time after 51 km, with a lead of 25 seconds over Stéphane Peterhansel.

However, Carlos Sainz, unfettered so far by worries, encountered problems in the form of two punctures. After 148 km, with Chicherit still in the lead, Al Attiyah had clawed back 5' on Sainz, and continued to do so until the end of the stage: 5'30 after 190 km and 5'38 at the finishing line, almost putting Guerlain Chicherit's fine achievement in the shade. The French driver reacquainted himself with victory 4 years after winning the stage between Tambacounda and Dakar. In the end, he beat Argentinean Orlando Terranova, who was evidently happy to return home and offer Mitsubishi and the JMB Stradale team its best performance on this Dakar. Having battled much of the day for a stage win, Stéphane Peterhansel finally finished 6th 2 minutes behind the day's winner.

In the general standings, Nasser Al Attiyah cut the distance between himself and Sainz in half. The Qatari is now 4'28 behind. All is well for Volkswagen with Miller in third, but the headache continues for Kris Nissen, VW team manager, with his leading two drivers closer than ever and pushing themselves to their limits.

As has become customary, the truck race was again dominated by the Kamaz clan. The Tatarstan team achieved a 10th successive one-two. Today's winner was title holder Firdaus Kabirov. He beat his team-mate and general standings leader Vladimir Chagin by 32". This makes it Kabirov's 3rd stage win this year and the 32nd of his career on the event. Just like in the last two stages, Frenchman Joseph Adua, behind the wheel of an Iveco, has to make do with third place. In the general standings, the "Tsar" still holds a lead of 1 hour 12 minutes.

source: www.dakar.com