



### **Stage 3: Despres Steals The Limelight, “Peter” Raises The Stakes**

The third stage, marked by mechanical problems for Coma and Frétygné, as well as the withdrawal of Viladoms, was won by Cyril Despres, new leader in the general standings. He now boasts a lead of 10'03'' over David Casteu. In the car category, Stéphane Peterhansel picked up his 52nd special stage victory on the Dakar and his 19th on four wheels. In the truck race, Vladimir Chagin won his third consecutive stage, picking up the 50th triumph of his career.

The first sand dunes of the Dakar 2010 gave Cyril Despres the opportunity to take control of the rally on the stage leading to Fiambala. Before even leaving Argentina, on a relatively short stage, the race leaders were confronted with the hazards of sand. Over a distance of 182 kilometres, the Frenchman opened up a gap of 10'40'' over Helder Rodrigues, 2nd in the special. The Portuguese rider has therefore placed himself as a legitimate pretender for the podium, especially with the rhythm at which mishaps are occurring. After the petrol problems of Francisco “Chaleco” Lopez and the false withdrawal of Frans Verhoeven, who eventually rejoined the race after several hours spent changing his engine, today it was the turn of Marc Coma and David Casteu to encounter problems.

In fact, the title holder had a real struggle with his machine. Admittedly he started with the best time at CP1 (after 74 km), but his progression to the finishing line took a turn for the worse. He had to stop many times to calm a “spluttering” engine, losing 21 minutes on Despres, the new leader of the general standings. It never rains, it only pours, and this bad news for Coma came with the blow of losing his right-hand man on this 3rd stage. Jordi Viladoms, who was “celebrating” his 30th birthday today, fell heavily on the special. The Catalan was transported by helicopter to the bivouac for medical attention and was forced to abandon the race, his third withdrawal in four participations. David Casteu, who won the first special stage, was also forced to slow down, firstly, to avoid the engine of his Sherco overheating, then secondly to lend a hand to his rival and nonetheless friend Marc Coma. However, a battery failure temporarily stopped him from restarting afterwards! David Frétygné, who also faced difficulties on the second half of the stage, was also amongst the favourites who lost time: at the end of the stage to Fiambala, he is already several hours behind Despres.

In the car race, the contact with the sand was also a difficult experience for some of the favourites, but not for Stéphane Peterhansel, who greedily gobbled up the sand dunes on his path. Starting in 6th this morning, the three times winner overtook all his rivals with the minimum of fuss, including the speedy VWs of Carlos Sainz and Nasser Al Attiyah. At the end of the special, the advantage gained by Peterhansel's amounted to several minutes: Sainz was 5'44'' behind on the day's stage and in the general standings, the new commander of the rally boasts a lead of 4'33'' over the Spaniard. For the new recruit at BMW X-Raid, a team that had not experienced the joy of a stage victory since the 2006 edition, it is a first step towards the goal of a

tenth Dakar triumph.

For some competitors, the ambition of outright victory was annihilated between La Rioja and Fiambala. Firstly, the game is over for title holder Giniel De Villiers, who had to stop after 50 km due to engine problems. As a result, the South African has lost all chances of a double. The situation is also complicated for Robby Gordon, whose Hummer lost a fair amount of minutes on the leaders. As for Nani Roma, winner of the first special stage in the rally, he got stuck in a hole after skidding off the road at the 92 km point. The hours spent waiting for his assistance team also mean that his dreams of outright victory have been broken.

The truck category was marked by a notable event on completion of the day's special, even if Vladimir Chagin winning is not at all unusual. In fact, it has become so customary that the Russian grabbed his 50th victory today, placing the Tsar on level terms with the record of Ari Vatanen. He can now concentrate on another record: the number of titles in the truck rally, still held by Karel Loprais. In any case, it will not be the latest representative of the Czech dynasty who will upset his plans: Ales Loprais's mechanical problems yesterday meant he was not even able to start today's stage.