



## **Stage 4: Coma Regains Some Ground; Gordon Aims Right**

With a 9th stage victory in the Dakar, Marc Coma regains some ground in the general standings of a race still dominated by Cyril Despres. In the car category, the desert gave Robby Gordon's Hummer wings; the US driver wins the stage thanks to a tiny second lead over Stéphane Peterhansel. In the truck category, Vladimir Chagin celebrates his 40th birthday by getting a 51st special stage victory in the Dakar, his fourth in the four stages of this year's edition.

Rally raid experience teaches that victories are built in the long run. After losing more than 40 minutes in two days on grounds of penalty and multiple failures of a moody engine, title holder Marc Coma is fighting hard to regain ground in the general standings. The arrival in Chile and the first contact with the Atacama Desert were the playground of Marc Coma's demonstration of full mastery. After starting 9th today, the Catalan finishes with the best clock of the day after passing by along the trail the likes of Street, Manca and Duclos. Focused and efficient the rider may now see the fruits of his hard work upon arrival. He beat Casteu (2nd) by 2'04'' and stole 3'14'' back to Despres (3rd), who was in charge of opening the trail today. In the end the day's good work pushes Coma up 3 places in the overall standings putting him 6th 36'50'' behind Cyril Despres.

Behind the top trio the outsiders are still making their presence known. Francisco « Chaleco » Lopez had managed to win in 2009 for the first finish in Chile. Behind the wheel of a 450cc Aprilia enrolled on the Dakar to make a point, the local kid did manage to achieve a very nice 4th place in today's ranking arriving 5'06'' after Coma. The top 5 of the general standings remains unchanged with Helder Rodrigues (3rd 23'45'' behind Despres), Luca Manca (4th at 29'51'') and Alain Duclos (5th at 38'20'') who all confirm their intentions to shake up the 'battle of the chiefs'.

New country, new terrain... the change in environment allows other drivers to make the headlines. Robby Gordon, who probably felt too enclosed on the Argentinean trails with his big Hummer, had the opportunity to open up and let loose the energy he had been containing for a few days. In addition to his talent and speed, the American also seems to be on a good luck streak this year. After 163km of jumps and slaloms around camel grass, he gets the best time of the day with just a one-second lead over Stéphane Peterhansel. The vast landscape must remind him of Mauritania where he had won his first special stage in Zouerat in 2007.

Gordon's glorious feat is however not yet enough to shake up the struggle for final victory in which Stéphane Peterhansel is still in the best position. Still very much at ease when he is opening the trail, the top BMW X-Raid driver had all intermediary best clocks closely tailed by Carlos Sainz and Nasser Al-Attiyah! If he lets the

American get all the honours for the day, “Peter” who is now the sole bearer of his team’s hopes of victory after the withdrawal of Roma, keeps working hard and tidy. He now has a good 7’36’’ lead over Sainz who is his first follower in the standings.

At Kamaz, some traditions are meant to be respected. For instance, Vladimir Chagin wanted to win this January 5th stage, the stage of his birthday. It was already the case last year but also in 2006, the year he last won the Dakar. In the Russian clan all drivers will deserve a glass of vodka for this fourth consecutive victory. The Tsar now has a 28 minute lead over his prime follower and team mate Firdaus Kabirov.