



Stage 6: Coma Still On A Mission; "Peter" For Glory

The many navigation mistakes of his contenders allowed Marc Coma to finish with the best time of the day in the bike category and to move up four places in the overall standings. Moreover Italian rider Luca Manca, who was ranking ninth this morning in the overall standings, had to be evacuated from the track after a very serious fall in the early hours of the stage (see special press release). In the car category, Stéphane Peterhansel beat all three top Volkswagen winning the 53rd special stage of his Dakar career. Vladimir Chagin, master in the truck category, has increased his total number of victories to 52 for his Dakar career.

Performance and riding technique... of course but in rally raid you recognize champions at the way they navigate too. If there was any demonstration of that fact needed, Marc Coma gave another proof of his navigation talent today between Antofagasta and Iquique. The first part of the special stage was a particularly challenging navigation test. "Chaleco" himself – who was opening the track as yesterday's special stage winner – was caught in the trap despite his knowledge of the area. After a bad choice at km 23, Lopez lost some precious minutes and took along some of the best "outsiders" of the raid like David Frégné, Alain Duclos, Paulo Goncalves or Pal-Anders Ullevalseter. As for the leader in the overall standings, Cyril Despres did not allow being influenced by the Aprilia rider. Luckily because he was able to keep a tidy and flawless race, making the right choices when interpreting the road-book he managed to get to the finish line on a sober strategy and a good but not too fast pace.

Having left a little further behind the leaders in ninth position, the title holder managed to avoid "nav traps". Coma also decided to speed things up to climb back a few places in the standings. This proved to be the right strategy for the Spaniard who regains about 10' on Cyril Despres and is now 1h06' behind the standings leader. This 9th special stage victory also allows him to pass the like of Jonah Street, Paulo Goncalves, Pal-Anders Ullevalseter and Alain Duclos in the standings. He jumps four places in one day even if the other places he still needs to jump might be harder to conquer.

The subtleties to grasp were obviously the same for the car co-pilots as for the riders before them. Here too the first 50 km of the stage sorted out the winners and losers. Mark Miller and Carlos Sainz were better inspired than their teammate Nasser Al Attiyah on this section of the stage and kept going without any major problem. But despite the great speed of the Race Touareg, the day's wizard was undoubtedly Stéphane Peterhansel, who had started 14th. On the way the 301 X3 passed 10 cars before getting best time of the day, 47' faster than Carlos Sainz! If the Spaniard stays in the lead in the standings, "Peter" makes the difference with panache and caters for his statistical record by winning his 53rd stage in a Dakar.

Apart from Nasser Al Attiyah who lost a few minutes to Sainz but remains second in the overall standings (15'24'' behind), the day was also pretty counterproductive for the former first contender for VW. Not only did Robby Gordon lose ground on the drivers on the provisional podium but he was also jumped in the standings by the Mitsubishi Lancer of Portuguese driver Carlos Sousa (4th 1h34' behind Sainz) and by Polish driver Krzysztof Holowczyc (5th 1h43' behind).

Vladimir Chagin has temporarily cleared the way around his blue truck; maybe the Russian driver decided to hit straight at Stéphane Peterhansel. It is the case for sure on statistics grounds as this fifth stage victory of his on this Dakar brings him to a total number of 52 stage victories, i.e just one less than "Peter". Today he finishes the stage – once again – in front of his teammate Firdaus Kabirov with the additional satisfaction of seeing Ilgizar Mardeev, the driver of the third Kamaz truck finish third between Antofagasta and Iquique.

source: www.dakar.com