



Stage 8: Number 2 For Lopez, "Peter" Hard At Work

In Copiapo, “Chaleco” Lopez won his second stage in Chile this year and steps onto the provisional podium for the Dakar, on which Ullevalseter also climbed a step, but still with a big gap to race leader Despres. In the car race, the stage was won by a competitor running after a lost cause: Stéphane Peterhansel, 4th in the general standings more than two hours behind Sainz, grabbed his 54th stage victory. In the truck category, Vladimir Chagin was also the quickest in the stage for the 54th time on the Dakar.

The situation in the bike race was dramatically changed with the relegation of Marc Coma from 2nd to 24th place in the general standings. Whilst the penalty leaves the road open for Cyril Despres, on the condition that he avoids any big mistakes and keeps his pursuers at a distance, the fight for second place could become fierce. Some way behind the leader, three riders were separated this morning by 11 minutes, with a slight advantage for Helder Rodrigues over Pal-Anders Ullevalseter and Francisco Lopez. In this three-way struggle, the pick of the day was the performance by “Chaleco”, who overtook his Portuguese rival on the road to Copiapo. In doing so, the Chilean won another stage in his homeland, the third in his career and really made the difference on the second section of the stage.

Lopez will therefore be responsible for opening the road tomorrow, which means he will be taking on the role played today by Cyril Despres. The two times winner of the Dakar was confronted with navigational difficulties in addition to problems with the rim on his back wheel. It was only at CP3, after 245 kilometres of the stage, that he was able to retrieve the wheel of his ‘water carrier’ Ruben Faria and finish in better conditions. He arrived on the finishing line in 5th place on the day, trailing “Chaleco” by 6’43”, but more importantly his command over the general standings was not adversely affected. He will start tomorrow’s stage with a still comfortable lead of 1 hour 20 minutes over Norwegian Pal-Anders Ullevalseter.

On four wheels, the internal hierarchy in the Volkswagen team has not really changed. The risks of punctures made the leaders cautious. Carlos Sainz, who made his two wheel changes after 300 km, was especially careful in the last 200, which he finished without a spare wheel. Similarly, Nasser Al Attiyah was stopped twice by punctures and was therefore unable to benefit from Sainz’s relatively sober pace. The stage could still have been won by a Race Touareg, because Giniel De Villiers, a long way off the business end of the race after having lost more than four hours, achieved the best intermediate time after 300 kilometres. However, he also lost a handful of minutes due to a puncture, eventually finishing in 4th place on the day.

As a spectator of this rather feeble battle on the sands of the Atacama Desert, Stéphane Peterhansel got to grips with the situation fairly quickly, spending most of the day at the head of the rally after overtaking Al Attiyah. Comfortable on fast tracks

and in the dunes, the Frenchman was able to claw a small bit of time back on the leading trio of VWs. He also grabbed fourth place in the general standings from his team-mate Guerlain Chicherit, who put in the best time at CPI but who then had to deal with punctures and electrical problems. With this success in Copiapo, Peterhansel now trails Sainz by 2.02:05, but boasts a collection of victories whose total continues to amaze: 54!

In the truck race, the parade continues for Vladimir Chagin. The Russian won his 7th stage out of 8 at Copiapo! His collection of triumphs has now swollen, just like Stéphane Peterhansel, to 54. However, the Tsar has a much more relaxed outlook on his perspectives for outright victory than his car driving colleague. At present, he boasts a lead of 1 hour 16 minutes over his nearest pursuer in the general standings, his team-mate Firdaus Kabirov.

source: www.dakar.com