



## Eight pairings to represent the X-raid colours in the 2017 Dakar

- **Hirvonen, Al-Rajhi, Menzies and Terranova are the spearheads**
- **Altitude will be a true challenge**

The Dakar Rally is the most gruelling cross-country event in the world and in the coming edition, the enormous heights in Bolivia and the difficult navigation will take drivers and navigators to their limits. Eight pairings will cross the starting line Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, for X-raid. Several drivers of the line-up have been collaborating with X-raid for quite a while others are going to make their Dakar debut with a 4x4, this time.

This year X-raid relies on younger drivers, to build a competitive squad for the future. In addition, the four top drivers come from four completely different parts of the world: Finland's Mikko Hirvonen, Yazeed Al-Rajhi from Saudi Arabia, US-American Bryce Menzies and Argentinean Orlando Terranova.

It will be the second Dakar for Mikko Hirvonen. He already impressed in his debut appearance by finishing fourth, last year. Together with his French co-driver Michel Périn he gathered more cross-country rallying experience, in the past months and celebrated his maiden win in the sport in the Hungarian Baja.

"I'm really looking forward to my second Dakar," says Hirvonen. "I learned a lot in my first Dakar appearance and we worked hard in cooperation with the team to prepare as good as possible. I know that we will have to face another major challenge but I just can't wait for rolling across the starting ramp. Of course I want to try to make it to the podium, in January. It's a difficult race and anything can happen but with a little luck we may become a factor in the battle for the win."

Yazeed Al-Rajhi and Timo Gottschalk (GER) will contest their first Dakar for X-raid. However, the pairing already contested the event held in South America twice. In the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, the Sealine Cross Country Rally in Qatar and the 2016

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new dimension

**JOHN COOPER WORKS**

Silk Way Rally from Moscow to Beijing 2016 he finished runner-up three times in a MINI.

“It will be thrilling for us as we are going to contest the rally with a new car and for a new team. We are really look forward to the Dakar and the MINI is a great car,” reveals Al-Rajhi. “But we also know that the competition will be tough and that it won’t be easy for us. First of all we want to make it to Buenos Aires but we also want to try hard to make it to the podium. We know what we are able to achieve and want to contest the event with a clever strategy and without making any mistakes.”

For Bryce Menzies and Pete Mortensen (USA), the event held in January represents virgin soil. They are going to contest the Dakar for the first time. In his first cross-country rallying season, Menzies already secured several fine results. In his first rally, the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, he surprised by coming fourth and in the Hungarian Baja he even made it to second place.

“Competing in the Dakar has been my dream for quite a while. I just can’t wait for contesting the event together with X-raid, thus making this dream come true,” Menzies said. “X-raid is one of the most successful teams in the history of the Dakar and therefore, I couldn’t have a better partner. They supported me and my co-driver a lot when it came to finding the necessary speed. I competed in several events on different terrains and although none of them prepared me for the Dakar hundred percent I feel well with the team and in the car.”

Orlando Terranova once again will race for X-raid, in 2017. For the Argentinean, the Dakar Rally virtually is a home race. In this edition he will be accompanied by the extremely experience German navigator Andreas Schulz. Terranova who finished fifth twice, in the Dakar, wants to battle it out for the podium, in front of his compatriots.

Boris Garafulic (CHI) and Filipe Palmeiro (POR) are a well-rehearsed pairing. They have been contesting rallies as a team since 2014 and secured several top-10 results. For Garafulic it will be the fourth Dakar he is going to contest for X-raid.

Following his switch from the motorbike to four wheels last year, Jakub ‚Kuba‘ Przygonski familiarised himself better and better with his new vehicle. In the Dakar, the young Pole will team-up with the experienced Belgian Tom Colsoul. The pairing finished fifth in the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and the Rallye du Maroc during this season.

Stephan Schott (GER) isn't ready to miss out on the ninth Dakar on the South American continent. After having been forced into early retirement in the 2016 Dakar – the first time the German didn't make it to the finish line – he once again wants to go for it, this January. Schott will rely on the navigation skills of Paulo Fiúza from Portugal.

The latest asset to the MINI ALL4 Racing squad is Qatar's Mohamed Abu Issa. He contested the event in the recent past on a quad and in his first Dakar, in 2014, he finished fourth. The 2017 Dakar will be his first behind the wheel of a 4x4. He will be teamed-up with French navigator Xavier Panseri.

In late November, the team will take all the service and racing vehicles to Le Havre, France. There they will be loaded on board of a car ferry to then be shipped to South America. And on the 02<sup>nd</sup> of January, the Dakar Rally will be started in Asuncion, Paraguay's capital.