



2016 Dakar // Al-Attiyah and the MINI ALL4 Racing – Winners in the four-wheel-drive ranking

- Successful Dakar debut for Mikko Hirvonen and Harry Hunt
- Four MINI ALL4 Racing vehicles secure top-10 positions

Torrential rain, floodings, heat, enormous heights... The 2016 edition of the Dakar rally once again proved to be an event featuring extremes for man and machine. With their MINI ALL4 Racing, Nasser Al-Attiyah (QAT) and Mathieu Baumel (FRA) finished as best placed all-wheel drive pairing. Only one driver, Stéphane Peterhansel, completed the 2016 Dakar faster than Al-Attiyah but the French two wheel buggy driver still has to face an appeal. And so, the entire Dakar result is provisional, so far. "The rollover in the Fiambala stage cost us a lot of time. Otherwise, we could have made it to the very top by our own effort," revealed Nasser Al-Attiyah. "But that's the Dakar. Everybody makes mistakes. I would love to also contest the 2017 Dakar and once again battle it out for the win."

While the battle of the 4x4 vehicles – particularly the MINI ALL4 Racing and the Toyota – was extremely close, the buggies succeeded in – in particular in the first week – using both the routes suiting them well and the advantage they enjoyed due to the technical regulations for opening a big lead over the rest of the field. But in the second week, the reliability, durability, manoeuvrability and staying power of the MINI ALL4 Racing vehicles allowed their drivers to close the gap and battle their way up to the top positions. The stage win of Al-Attiyah on the eighth stage represented the necessary boost for the final attack, resulting in another two stage wins. In the end, three of the MINI ALL4 Racing vehicles made it to the top six in the overall standings.

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Finland's Mikko Hirvonen who switched from WRC to cross-country rallying, last year, made a sensational Dakar debut. He contested the 2016 edition of the legendary event together with the experienced French navigator Michel Périn. The pairing particularly impressed with their consistency, finished fifth in nearly every stage and made virtually no mistakes. "I just can't believe how well the Dakar ran for me," beamed the Finn. "The cooperation between Michel and me improved day by day and the team did a fantastic job. As I see it, the key to our success was the fact that we completed the Dakar without encountering any major problems on our MINI ALL4 Racing or making any bigger mistakes. I had hoped for making it to the top five and that's exactly what we achieved."

For Nani Roma and Alex Haro (both ESP), the Dakar began with a major setback. On stage two they got stuck in a mud hole for nearly an hour. But they didn't give up and step by step, they battled their way back up in the overall standings. In stage nine, when many of their rivals struggled with problems, they had a trouble-free day and as a result, the leaped back up to the top 10. On the following days they kept on gaining ground to finish 6th, in the end. "It was a somewhat weird Dakar for us and the first days didn't run really well," admitted Roma. "It was the only second Dakar for Alex and we needed some days to learn to chime together. But now, we have found the way to an automatic cooperation and I'm really happy that we achieved this level. That's why we were able to work our way back up to the top flight. The difficult stages just suit us. There, we can make maximum use of our strengths and there we gained a lot of time."

For Orlando Terranova and Ronnie Graue (both ARG), the 2016 Dakar didn't run as they had hoped it would. Like Nani Roma they got stuck in a mud hole in stage two, thus losing a lot of time. And on the following days, things also didn't run according to the Argentinians' plans. "Unfortunately, the only thing I can say is that it wasn't a good Dakar for us," said the Argentinian. "It just wasn't to be, for us."

Young Briton Harry Hunt, however, impressed with a good Dakar debut. Like Hirvonen, he also had been teamed up with an experienced co-driver: Andreas Schulz. The two-time Dakar winner particularly focused on making sure that the Dakar rookie contested the special stages with the necessary calmness. A strategy that paid off. In the end, the pairing took their MINI ALL4 racing to 10th position overall. "I'm virtually over the moon," the Briton beamed after having crossed the finish podium. "My first Dakar, I made it to the finish and I secured 10th place. That's just incredible. "It was extremely tough but we completed the event nearly without being hampered by major problems. And a big thank you to Andy. He was the calm anchor in our car."

Meanwhile, Poland's Adam Malysz and his French co-driver Panseri displayed true Dakar spirit. On stage nine, from Uyuni to Salta, their clutch broke in the opening stages. The two waited for the race truck to afterwards let it tow them through the entire special stage, including all the waypoints. At 10:00hrs on the day of rest, nearly 24 hours after having started into the stage in Bolivia, they arrived in the bivouac at Salta. "That's not the way how we hoped to finish the first week," admitted Malysz. "But we also weren't ready to give up. Therefore, we opted for passing all the waypoints with the race truck instead of taking shortcuts. Fortunately, we and our mechanics could use the day of rest for getting the MINI ready to race again."

The Dakar itself will be remembered as one of the wettest in the sport's history. The first stage had to be cancelled due to too much water and later, several special stages had to be shortened due to too high water levels of rivers. In Jujuy, Argentina, rain falling hour by hour flooded the entire bivouac. From the rain, the Dakar baggage hit the road to Bolivia's heights. On stage five, the competitors arrived at 4,600 metres above sea level, the highest point ever in a Dakar special stage. Numerous drivers struggled with head ache caused by the low oxygen content in the air. Then, back in Argentina, in the dunes of Fiambala, the field had to cope with a heat wave. Because of the temperatures rising up to 50° C, the 9th special stage had to be stopped early.

Sven Quandt, X-raid Team Manager

"I'm proud of our crews and our mechanics who never gave up although many already had written us off, in the first week. But we battled our way back up. In the second week, the MINI ALL4 Racing could make full use of its strengths and advantages. I have to congratulate Nasser who once again made it to the very top, with his pace. Mikko delivered in sensational style. To make so few mistakes in your first Dakar is truly amazing. It was an extremely gruelling Dakar – not only for the drivers but for the entire team. The rain in the first week, the extreme altitude and the enormous heat in the second represented an extreme strain but was mastered in fantastic style by everybody."

Overall standings Dakar 2016

1st S. Peterhansel (FRA) / J.-P. Cottret (FRA) Peugeot – 45h 22m 10s*

2nd **N. Al-Attiyah (QAT) / M. Baumel (FRA) MINI ALL4 Racing – 45h 57m 08s**

3rd G. De Villiers (ZAF) / D. von Zitzewitz (GER) Toyota – 46h 24m 57s

4th **M. Hirvonen (FIN) / M. Périn (FRA) MINI ALL4 Racing – 46h 27m 28s**

5th L. Poulter (ZAF) / R. Howie (ZAF) Toyota – 46h 52m 53s

6th J. Roma (ESP) / A. Haro (ESP) MINI ALL4 Racing – 47h 03m 16s

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10th H. Hunt (GBR) / A. Schulz (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing – 48h 33m 40s

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12th O. Terranova (ARG) / B. Graue (ARG) MINI ALL4 Racing – 50h 11m 04s

13th E. van Loon (NDL) / W. Rosegaar (NDL) MINI ALL4 Racing – 50h 44m 23s

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15th J. Przygonski (POL) / A. Rudnitski (BLR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 51h 02m 10s

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23rd B. Garafulic (CHL) / F. Palmeiro (POR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 54h 55m 28s

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45th N. Lopez (ARG) / S. Lafuente (URU) MINI ALL4 Racing – 69h 53m 55s

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53rd A. Malysz (POL) / X. Panseri (FRA) MINI ALL4 Racing – 74h 08m 13s

*subject to appeal