



## Dakar 2017 / SS1: Two MINI John Cooper Works Rally vehicles in the top 10

- Al-Rajhi and Hirvonen seventh and ninth respectively
- Tomorrow, the pairings will have to cope with WRC-like challenges

Today, the Dakar Rally finally started into its 2017 edition, with stage one taking the field from Paraguay's capital Asuncion to Resistencia, Argentina. Prior to the border crossing the drivers had to contest a short 39-kilometre special stage. Yazeed Al-Rajhi (KSA) and Timo Gottschalk (GER) set the seventh-fastest time, thus finishing two positions ahead of their MINI John Cooper Works Rally team-mates Mikko Hirvonen (FIN) and Michel Périn (FRA). Argentinean Orlando Terranova and his German navigator Andreas Schulz came 11<sup>th</sup>.

"We just wanted to complete the stage without making mistakes," Al-Rajhi explained. "The special stage was short but demanding, particularly for the car. We now are going to increase the pressure step by step to try to battle it out for a podium finish."

"Actually, everything went well today," revealed Hirvonen. "The track was fast but featured several surprising holes and bumps. But we had no problems and I'm happy with how we fared. Nonetheless, I have to admit that I tend to decelerate too much on very bumpy roads. I still lack the feeling for the car, in these situations. I'm looking forward to having to contest a real cross-country stage instead of another sprint, tomorrow."

"This was my first special stage with Andi as my navigator," said Terranova. "We are familiarising with one another better and better. The setup of the MINI suited the stage really well. In this stage we actually would have needed a road book as the ones used in WRC as the speed was high and the terrain difficult."

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Kuba Przygonski (POL) and Tom Colsoul (BEL) set the 14<sup>th</sup>-fastest time while Sylvio Barros (BRA) and Rafael Capoani (ITA) who were signed as MINI ALL4 Racing pairing at short notice did really well and finished 21<sup>st</sup>, right ahead of Boris Garafulic (CHI) and Filipe Palmeiro (POR) in 22<sup>nd</sup>. Qatar's Mohamed Abu Issa who is about to contest his first Dakar Rally in a car and his navigator Xavier Panseri (FRA) came 23<sup>rd</sup>. Stephan Schott (GER) was hampered by food poisoning but secured the fine 31<sup>st</sup> position, nevertheless.

"This rather was a kind of a sprint race," assessed Przygonski. "We pushed and also found a good rhythm. The gaps between the cars are small, just a few seconds. In the special stage we closed in on Spartaro and lost some time in his dust. But he quickly let us pass and that was great as more often than not, passing an opponent is difficult. The track was really demanding and in addition, there were some rather deep water crossings."

"I was as excited as if I was about to contest my first Dakar," admitted Abu Issa. "Furthermore, the track was narrow, bumpy and difficult to race on – just the components you don't need if you are a newcomer in the car category. You want room that allows you to make mistakes. But it worked well and I got out of the car with a smile on my face."

Tomorrow, the competitors will have to cope with a clearly bigger challenge: a total distance of 802 kilometres from Resistencia to San Miguel de Tucuman, with 275 of them representing the special-stage distance. It will be a typical Argentinean special stage, mainly reminding of WRC routes. And due to the dispersed dust, overtaking will be extremely difficult.

#### Result Dakar 2017 SS1:

1. N. Al-Attiyah (QAT) / M. Baumel (FRA) Toyota – 25m 41s
2. X. Pons (ESP) / R. Garcia (ARG) Ford – 26m 05s
3. N. Roma (ESP) / A. Haro (ESP) Toyota – 26m 10s
4. C. Sainz (ESP) / L. Cruz (ESP) Peugeot – 26m 14s
5. G. de Villiers (KZA) / D. Von Zitzewitz (GER) Toyota – 26m 22s
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7. Y. Al-Rajhi (KSA) / T. Gottschalk (GER) MINI John Cooper Works Rally – 26m 47s
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9. M. Hirvonen (FIN) / M. Périn (FRA) MINI John Cooper Works Rally – 27m 01s
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11. O. Terranova (ARG) / A. Schulz (GER) MINI John Cooper Works Rally – 27m 05s

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14. J. Przygonski (POL) / T. Colsoul (BEL) MINI ALL4 Racing – 27m 28s

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21. S. Barros (BRA) / R. Capoani (ITA) MINI ALL4 Racing – 28m 48s

22. B. Garafulic (CHI) / F. Palmeiro (POR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 28m 59s

23. M. Abu Issa (QAT) / X. Panseri (FRA) MINI ALL4 Racing – 29m 02s

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31. S. Schott (GER) / P. Fiúza (POR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 30m 59s