



Left: Spanish Father and daughter team Manolo and Monica Plaza in the 42nd Dakar Rally Above: A competitor in the T5 trucks category Below: Double Formula 1 World Champion Fernando Alonso preparing to race 2020 Dakar

circumnavigated north Africa, before finishing in the Senegalese capital, Dakar. It made worldwide headlines when former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's son Mark went missing in the Sahara for six days, while competing in the 1982 edition of the rally.

In 2009, the event moved to South America before finding a new home in Saudi Arabia in 2020. Next year's contest, running from December 31st to January 15th, 2023 will be the 45th edition of the Dakar – which is currently at the forefront of a motorsports revolution.

Last year a new, low-emission category was introduced: the T1 Ultimate. This gives manufacturers the freedom to develop SUVs (Sports Utility Vehicles) powered by either electric motors, hybrids or combustion engines fuelled by hydrogen. This has led to Audi ditching its Le Mans 24 Hours sportscar programme

to concentrate on developing alternative power unit technologies in the extreme conditions that Dakar offers.

The German marque debuted its 671bhp RS Q e-Tron in last year's hot and arid campaign – with former rally champion (and father of current Ferrari F1 driver) Carlos Sainz Sr at the wheel – and they are expected to be joined by more manufacturers in the T1.U class in the future.

Entries for the 2023 event are still open, but last year the victor was Nasser Al-Attiyah (with co-driver Matthieu Baumel) who clinched overall honours amongst the 430 vehicles that entered. Driving for Toyota Gazoo Racing, it was the Qatari driver's fourth Dakar title and he finished ahead of multiple world rally champion Sebastien Loeb.

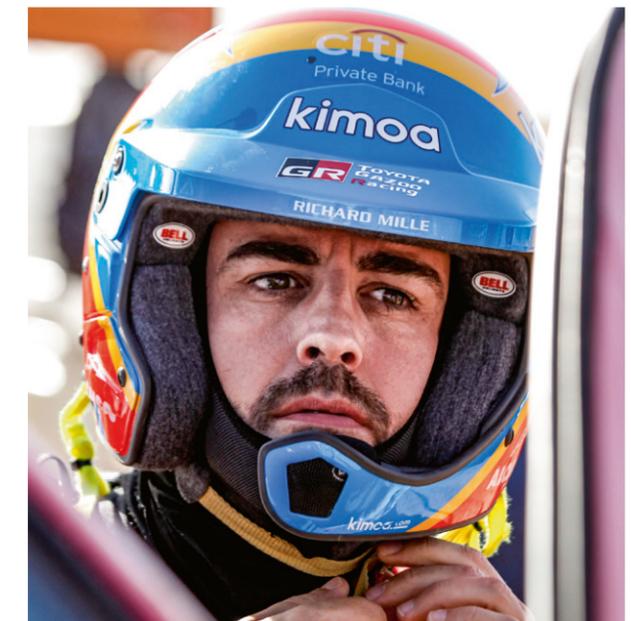
British rider Sam Sunderland was victorious on his motorbike by the slimmest of margins: just over three minutes separated him from second-placed Pablo Quintanilla at the chequered flag in Jeddah. That was after two weeks and 9,000km of competition across sandy and rocky terrain.

The big names are expected once more in 2023 and there is hope that two female racers will

return to the competition. They made history last year as the first Saudi women to compete in the famous event. Dania Akeel and Mashael AlObaidan drove Can-Am Mavericks in the T3 buggy class. They were supported by the only female winner of the Dakar, German racer Jutta Kleinschmidt, who was victorious in 2001. "The Dakar is such a difficult event," says Kleinschmidt. "It is one of the biggest adventures

on the planet. You might have to change a driveshaft in extreme heat or solve difficult situations. But that's what I loved about it and the competition element made it exciting. Ultimately, you want to win."

Who will reign supreme across the treacherous desert terrain in the 2023 edition of the epic Dakar Rally? We'll find out in Saudi Arabia next January... [dakar.com/en](https://www.dakar.com/en) ■



Into the empty quarter

Driving the reverse of the 2022 route in Saudi Arabia, the 2023 Dakar Rally has all the hallmarks of one of the great races in the quite incredible history of this 43-year-old motoring event, writes James Roberts

When drivers embark on the vast sand dunes of Saudi Arabia's foreboding 'Empty Quarter' next January, it will mark the start of the most gruelling and logistically-challenging motorsport event in the world. Crews on the famous Dakar Rally will navigate 10,000km of desert – in a competition that is not for the faint-hearted.

The two-week rally will be contested by off-road cars, motorbikes, buggies and even trucks. They will follow in the ancient footsteps of the Bedouin tribes. Starting at Sea Camp in Yanbu, on the shores of the majestic Red Sea, hundreds of vehicles will navigate the Arabian peninsula in a time trial, to determine who can reach the city of Dammam on the Persian

Gulf the quickest. The marathon will feature a total of 14-stages, with some as long as 500km, and will be the opening round of the FIA-FIM World Rally-Raid Championship. This will be the fourth occasion the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will have hosted this prestigious motorsports event.

The sheer scale of the Dakar is an extraordinary logistical challenge. During the rally, a huge

convoy of vehicles will follow the competitors. That includes a fleet of helicopters that provide race management, medical assistance and media coverage. Typically, 7,500 meals are freshly prepared each day, as the whole operation is housed in huge bivouacs along the route.

First held in the late 1970s, the endurance time trial originally started in Paris and