**MADE IN SOUTH AFRICA TOP SIX IN DAKAR STAGE 10**

*SA machinery dominates as leaders struggle, bikes fight hard*

Dakar 2024’s Stage 10 will be a day to remember for South African motorsport as made in SA cars dominated the top six shorter than usual 371 km Stage 10 loop raced over dirt tracks and a little sand around Al’Ula, as the overall leaders struggled. The bike race was spectacular as those overall leaders diced for the lead throughout, but Ricky Brabec who was ahead when it mattered to further open his lead on Botswana’s Ross Branch.

It was Toyota Hilux duo, privateers Guerlain Chicherit and Alex Winocq who made the early running in the cars ahead pf Gazoo pair Seth Quintero and Dennis Zenz, and Mattias Ekström and Emil Bergkvist in the first of the petrol-electric Audi. Overall leader Carlos Sainz and Lucas Cruz’ Audi sat eleventh and second placed crew Sebastien Loeb and Fabian Lurquin 16th in the Prodrive Hunter.

Lady racer Laia Sanz impressed in fourth in fourth in her Astara SA Century ahead of third overall Lucas Moraes and Armand Monleon’s Gazoo Hilux before the lead changed twice as Ekström went ahead, before Chicherit took charge to lead Kazakhstani Denis Krotov’s Hilux and Johannesburg’s Brian Baragwanath and Leonard Cremer fourth in their AWD Century. Rookie compatriot Saood Variawa raced into the top ten in his Gazoo Hilux.

There was however trouble behind as first overall leader Sainz stopped and lost almost half an hour. Then second man Loeb was in trouble and spent 20 minutes standing. Both re-joined, but Sainz’ lead was slashed as third man Moraes’ deficit came down a third to just under an hour.

Back on the stage, Chicherit stormed home to his sixth Dakar stage win over the years from a delighted Baragwanath, and Lithuanian Benedictus Vangas and Kuldar Sikk’s Hilux after a busy afternoon on the leaderboard. Italian duo Eugenio Amos and Paolo Ceci once again popped up in second from Dumas and rear drive leaders Mathieu Serradori and Loic Minaudier’s Century in a made in South Africa 1-2-3-4-5-6.

Saood Variawa emerged 11th for the day from teammate Moraes. Rookie leading South African crew Guy Botterill and Brett Cummings Gazoo Hilux was 15th and teammates Giniel de Villiers and Dennis Murphy 20th. Rookie SA Ford Ranger duo Gareth Woolridge and Boyd Dreyer were headed for a top 20 finish and teenage Aliyyah Koloc 30th in her Red-Lined REVO+.

Among them, struggling second placed overall Sebastien Loeb was looking like 20th after more trouble and leader Sainz headed for 29th or so, once all the cars came in. Which meant that Sainz’ overall lead was slashed from over 20, to just 13 minutes. Moraes sits third from de Mevius, Chicherit, and Serradori, with de Villiers 8th, Botterill ninth, Variawa 18th and Koloc provisionally 24th. Seven South African built cars remain in the top ten.

On two wheels, multiple former South African champion, Botswana hero Branch was quick out the box aboard his Hero, running second to KTM Privateer Martin Michek and ahead of 2023 winner Luciano Benavides’ Husqvarna. Unusually, current South African champion Bradley Cox KTM followed ahead of a line of Rally 2 riders, with Daniel Sanders’ GasGas tenth, and overall leader Brabec 16th on his Honda.

The order returned to more or less normality as Branch led Michek, Benavides, Brabec and his Honda teammate Jose Florimo, and Cox at the second waypoint. Overall leader Brabec was however on the move and into the lead by mid distance, ahead of Indian Rally 2 rider Harith Noah and Branch, a minute and 17 behind, as Cox slipped back.

Brabec kept the pressure on as Branch slipped back to end up three and a quarter minutes off Brabec in seventh. Jose Florimo and Adrien van Beveren made it a Honda 1-2-3 from Daniel Sanders’ GasGas, R2 winner Noah, Luciano Benavides, and Branch.

It was a crucial stage win for Brabec, who now leads Branch by 9 minutes 7 seconds. Van Beveren is less than three minutes behind Branch in third, with Florimo and KTM man Kevin Benavides and Toby Price in the top six. Bradley Cox slipped to sixteenth but remains 14th overall and fourth in Rally 2. Compatriot Charan Moore ended 32nd overall and provisionally lies 28th, Zimbabwe’s Ash Thixton was in 39th, Roland Venter 61st and Stuart Gregory 74th.

Ross Branch, who has a favourable starting position over his rival, has one more chance to steal the win from Ricky Brabec on Dakar 2024’s 480 km sting in the tail, while the car race will be just as crucial across more sandy dirt tracks to Yanbu, before Friday’s final 175 km loop to the finish there. Your Dakar Daily Report is powered by Toyota FGazoo Racing South Africa and Tork Craft tools.