

The 3rd race in the FIA World Cup, the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge is here April 3-10, 2014!



While the racers go deep into the desert, there are two great chances for spectators to participate in the live event:

SUPER SPECIAL SPECTATOR STAGE

The super special spectator stage, a major spectator event, takes place at 3pm on Saturday 5 April at Yas Island Abu Dhabi

RALLY FINISH

The rally finishes at Yas Marina Circuit Abu Dhabi, at 4.30pm, Thursday, 10 April

Here is a video from last year's event:

ROMA, COMA DEFEND TITLES IN ABU DHABI DESERT CHALLENGE

Sulayem says stage is set for classic desert rally as 108 challengers prepare for battle

Spain's Nani Roma will defend his drivers' title in the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge POWERED BY Nissan April 3-10 as fellow-countryman Marc Coma chases a record eighth bikes victory in the event.

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This year's two Dakar Rally winners are in a line-up of 108 competitors from 32 countries announced by the rally organisers, the Automobile and Touring Club of the UAE, after entries closed for the third round of this year's FIA World Cup for Cross Country Rallies.



Partnered by French co-driver Michel Perin, Roma drives one of six ALL4 Racing Minis built by the powerful German-based X-Raid team, who dominated the Dakar podium positions in January and now look for a similar result among the huge dunes and sabkha plains of the UAE's Western Region of Al Garbia.

Starting ahead of Roma as the top seeded driver is Saudi Arabia's Yazeed Al-Rajhi who leads the FIA World Cup series after winning the first two rounds in Russia and Italy and is partnered by German co-driver Timo Gottschalk in a Hummer Prototype.

With the 24th edition of the Desert Challenge also forming the opening round of this year's FIM Cross Country Rallies World Championship for bikes, Coma tops the list of 61 seeded riders from 22 countries.



Among his biggest rivals will be new KTM team-mate Sam Sunderland, the talented young Dubai-based rider who was on course for a superb Desert Challenge victory last year before a time penalty collected for a basic technical infringement dropped him to third.



"We're very happy with the size and quality of entries, and we have all the ingredients of a classic event," said ATCUAE President Mohammed Ben Sulayem, the FIA Vice President. "Whether it's their first Desert Challenge or they've been here many times before, all competitors face a big test. It doesn't matter how many times you do this event, you have to prepare thoroughly and have maximum concentration from start to finish."

Taking place under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler's Representative in the Western Region, the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge begins with a super special spectator stage on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, on 5 April.

Used by the route planning team to create the five demanding desert stages that follow, the Nissan Patrol, "Hero of All terrain in Life", is the official vehicle of the event for an 11th year.



The rally's line-up of strategic partners and supporters also includes the Ruler's Court in the Western Region, Western Region Municipality, Abu Dhabi Municipality the UAE Army, Abu Dhabi Police, Yas Marina Circuit, ADNOC, Abu Dhabi Aviation, Al Ain Water, Abu Dhabi Waste Management, Rotana and Centro Hotels - Yas Island, Qasr Al Sarab Resort, the Tourism Development and Investment Company, TAG Heuer, Explorer and DP World.



Seeking a second successive Desert Challenge win, Roma will be pursued by a succession of other powerful challengers, including third seeded Russian driver Vladimir Vasilyev in another Mini, and the next two seeds, Poland's Marek Dabrowski and Brazil's Reinaldo Varela, both driving a Toyota Hilux.

Dutchman Erik Van Loon, Poland's Martin Kaczmarksi, German Stephan Schott and Kazakistan's Aidyn Rakhimbayev drive the other All4 Racing Minis, while Czech driver Miroslav Zapletal enters his specially designed Hummer H3 Evo.

The host country's challenge is again spearheaded by Yahya Al Helei, who is seeded tenth and will be looking to add to his impressive list of finishes in the event at the wheel of a powerful Nissan Pick up, one of 16 Nissans in the field.

Al Helei's son Mansour drives one of 12 Nissan Patrols entered, as do fellow Emiratis Nabil Al Shamsi, Nooh Buhamid, Matar Al Mansoori and Ali Al Kitbi, Lebanon's Emil Khneisser, and Saudi's Ibrahim Al Muhana.



Fresh from his success in the inaugural UAE Desert Championship which saw him clinch the overall cars and buggies class, Emirati Ahmad Al Fahim competes in a Powertec Storm buggy built in Dubai.

Topping the rider seedings ahead of Coma is Portugal's Paulo Goncalves, who edged out the Spaniard to capture last year's FIM world title by taking his Honda to victory in the final round in Morocco.

Sunderland is seeded fourth behind another of his new KTM team-mates, Poland's Jakub Przygonski. The top eight seeds are completed by Honda riders Joan Barreda of Spain and Portugal's Helder Rodrigues, and KTM's Jordi Viladoms of Spain and Slovenia's Miran Stanovnik.



Defending quads champion Mohammed Abu Issa of Qatar and the UAE's 2006 winner, Atif Al Zarouni, will both be seeking their second victory in the event, although they face a stern challenge from Poland's reigning FIM world quads champion, top seeded Rafal Sonik.

www.abudhabidesertchallenge.com