



SILK WAY 2018 RALLY 丝绸之路拉力赛



D-1 – STATE THEATRE OPERA & BALLET – ASTRAKHAN – SCRUTINEERING / PODIUM

ON THE EVE OF BATTLE IN ASTRAKHAN

And there off on the SILK WAY 2018! After a second day of scrutineering at the spectacular site of the State Theatre Opera and Ballet in Astrakhan, the start ceremony has officially seen the 8th edition get under way from the mouth of the Volga. It is from here, at the gates of the Kalmoukie Desert, on Saturday morning that the principle favourites in the car and truck categories will begin their merciless battle for the victor’s laurels.

At the end of the second day of administrative and technical scrutineering all eyes are on the start podium, set up in front of the main entrance of the State Theatre, Opera and Ballet in Astrakhan where, at the beginning of the evening, all the competitors entered will set off for what promises to be an exceptional 2018 SILK WAY RALLY.

Present at the foot of the arch, Mr Zhilkin, the Governor of the Astrakham Region came along to wish the competitors good luck as they were about to set off for 3500 kilometres of racing. He also read out a message from the **President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Poutine.**

‘The Silk Way Rally is a very important event for fans of motorsport throughout the world. By taking on the challenge of tackling such difficult stages, the Russian and foreign competitors show to the full their professional abilities, their aptitudes, their solidarity as well as their capacity to get the best out of their vehicles. They offer sincere emotions to the great number of fans who follow the rally closely and actively support their favourite competitors. I am convinced that this year’s edition will be as interesting as it will be exciting. I wish lots of luck to the competitors and unforgettable memories to the spectators.’

Cars: Al-Attiyah down as favourite

Eight years after his second place in the wake of Carlos Sainz, his team mate at the time in the Volkswagen team, Nasser Al-Attiyah is back on the SILK WAY RALLY with barely concealed delight. Two times Dakar winner (2011 and 2015) and front runner on the last three rounds of the All-Terrain Rallies World Cup in the company of his faithful co-driver, the Frenchman Mathieu Baumel, the Qatari driver and his Toyota Hilux Overdrive are firm favourites in the car class. But there’s stiff competition, notably from the John Copper Works MINIs of the





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Spaniard Nani Roma and the Saudi Yazeed Al Rahji (2nd in 2016). Behind the wheel of a Peugeot 3008 DKR Maxi, the car that won the last two editions, the British driver Harry Hunt will also be a serious candidate for final victory. As will the Frenchman Mathieu Serradori and his Buggy SRT, that showed impressive pace on the Africa Eco Race last January. There will also be a fierce fight in the T2 category, reserved for production cars, where the Japanese driver Akira Miura (Toyota Land Cruiser) will be up against the other Toyotas of Chinese drivers Lu Binglong and Zi Yungang, the Russian ex-bike rider Anastasia Nifontova and the Frenchman Marco Piana. The many T3 vehicles on the start line also promise an interesting race. This class for SSVs (Side By Side Vehicles), lightweight buggies, offers a Franco-Russian confrontation between the Polaris RZR of Nicolas Duclos and Frédéric Chavigny and the Maverick X3 of Russians Sergei Kariakin (winner of the 2017 Dakar in the quad class) and the all-female crew of Mariia Oparina and Taisilia Shtaneva, winners of the 2017 Silk Way Rally.

Trucks: who can break Kamaz's strangle hold?

With no less than six trucks at the start, the blue armada of the Kamaz-Master Team are once again firm favourites in the truck class. Winners of six out of the seven first editions, the Tatar trucks have dominated their 'local' race. With four of their 'sand monsters' equipped with the new 13 litre DCEC engine driven by three ex-winners of the race: Airat Mardeev (2012 and 2016), Dmitry Sotnikov (2013 and 2017) and Eduard Nikolaev (2010), as well as Andrey Karginov and Anton Shibalov, podium sitters these last years, Kamaz have made their intentions crystal clear. In addition they have entered a hybrid diesel-gas engine truck driven by Gazprom spokesman Sergey Kupriyanov. Not difficult to understand why it isn't going to be easy to break the 'Blues' stranglehold on the event. It won't however stop the Belarus driver Siarhei Viazovich, second on the last Dakar and lead driver of the four truck Maz-Sport team, from giving it his best shot. An ambition he shares with the Dutchman Martin Van Den Brink and his Renault Sherpa, who finished third of the 2016 SILK WAY RALLY, while the GAZ team of Russians Shklayev and Levitskii will be intending to give the Japanese Hinos of the Sugawara family a run for their money...

Vladimir Chagin, Silk Way Rally Director: *The route of the 8th Silk Way Rally is a condensed version of the best all-terrain rally tracks in the world. With hard sections, technical tracks, mountains and rocks, sand and dunes, plains and steppes. It is a rally that is both modern and classic, which makes it unpredictable even for the best drivers and teams in the world.'*





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Frédéric Lequien, Silk Way Rally Deputy Director: *'We are delighted to welcome to the start of this Silk Way Rally competitors from 24 different countries. The race will be followed by nearly 100 Russian and foreign journalists on the ground and broadcast by 60 television stations worldwide, which equates to two and a half million readers, listeners and tv viewers across the globe.'*

DID YOU KNOW?

The families Sugawara and Van Den Brink: generation game...

What do Yoshimasa Sugawara and Martin Van Den Brink have in common? Both have entered in the truck class, the Japanese national will drive a Hino, while the Dutchman will start the race aboard his giant Team Mammoet Renault. And both will be racing the 2018 SILK WAY RALLY in the company of their respective sons. While, at 46 years of age, Teruhito Sugawara will drive his own Hino, at 16 Mitchel Van Den Brink, the youngest competitor on the race, will be in the cab alongside his father, thanks to a special derogation from the Dutch federation. With 34 participations (including 7 podiums) on the Dakar and at 77 years young, Yoshimasa Sugawara will once again get his name in the Guinness Book of Records, as the oldest competitor at the start of a car race!

Tomorrow: "Whoops and pipelines"

Run over 347.97 kms (of which 311 kms are special stage), in a loop around Astrakhan, the first stage of the 2018 SILK WAY RALLY is no warm up stage! Alternating fast sections with numerous portions of 'whoops', with some technical going thrown in for good measure, navigators will need to pay close attention to the road-book. Correct reading of compass headings and distances will be vital in order to avoid the traps and find the way over the many pipelines that cover the region.

