



# SILK WAY 2019 RALLY 丝绸之路拉力赛



## PRESS RELEASE

Alashan, July 14th 2019

GMT +8

### S.8 – BAYINBAOLIGE - ALASHAN

Distance: 786,11KM - Selective section: 326,60KM

**BAYINBAOLIGE - ALASHAN** - Full variety of surface

The eighth stage was not only the longest, after some rest during a “no race” day, but also the most challenging, as it offered a full variety of surface. The first high dunes set an initial challenge for those with little driving experience, and after catching the correct direction one faced a range of new obstacles – not just sand, but also dry river beds, ravines, canyons and steppes. The closer to finish, the faster one needed to move.

#### @ OF NOTE

# Bikes: Kevin Benavides wins the first Chinese stage

# Cars: Nasser Al-Attiyah seven out of seven

# Trucks: Viazovich cracks, Shibalov bites

# Tomorrow: Sand merchant...

### S.8 – The race





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Credit MCH Photo/Marian Chytka



## Bikes: Kevin Benavides win first Chinese stage

For the bike competitors, who had never ridden in the Gobi Desert before, the big question was 'how would the dunes here compare to others they'd ridden elsewhere in the world'? This evening Kevin Benavides gave us the answer – they are just like the famous Fiambala ones in Argentina. Feeling right at home on the first Chinese special, the Monster Energy Honda Team rider came from behind to win the stage, just 42 seconds ahead of another sand specialist, Adrien Van Beveren (Yamaha Rally Team) and 3'05 in front of an out-of-contention Paulo Goncalves (Hero Motorsports Team).

Sam Sunderland (Red Bull KTM Factory) should have been reasonably happy to maintain a reasonably 'comfortable' overall lead, but a crash in the special cast a shadow over his day. This evening he loses time to both the Benavides brothers. Teammate Luciano (Red Bull KTM Factory) moves up to second place overall (at 21:19), while thanks to this stage win, Kevin jumps up from 6th to 3rd (at 25:18). Predictably, the big loser on the day was the man obliged to open in the sand, Oriol Mena (Hero Motorsports Team). The Spaniard slips down from 2nd to 7th overall (at 32:15) – a tumble down the rankings that is an indication of just how close it is between the pack chasing after Sunderland. With two stages remaining in the dunes of the Gobi Desert and the Argentinian brothers maintaining the pressure, there's still everything to play for.

**Kevin Benavides (Arg/Monster Energy Honda Team) 1st:** *"Today I feel really good. I really enjoyed the first stage in China. It was very different from what we've had until now. More navigation, more desert, the dunes... It is an amazing place here in China. I am happy with my work today. We have two more days and my goal is to try and recover time."*

## Cars: Al-Attiyah seven out of seven

It is the big news of the week in the car class: never in the history of the SILK WAY RALLY, or in any other international event of this standing come to that, has a crew achieved such a run of stage victories... Nasser Al-Attiyah and Mathieu Baumel (Toyota Gazoo Racing Overdrive)





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have literally flown over this 9th edition. Especially impressive when you consider that this first stage in China, the longest of the rally, was anything but a stroll in the park. Sand as far as the eye could see, giant dunes and camel grass: there was plenty in the mix to catch out even the most accomplished driver, already far from fresh after by nearly 4000 kilometres of rally. At the finish, in front of a giant statue of Genghis Khan, Nasser Al-Atiyah was looking a little like an all-conquering warrior. Victorious but humble. *“There are two stages to race from here to the finish in Dunhuang and anything could still happen,”* admitted the three times Dakar winner. *“We aren’t especially trying to win every stage, but we are driving at our pace. We’ve seen a slice of Chinese desert today and I repeat it isn’t over yet.”*

Second again today, the Dutchman Eric Van Loon (Toyota Hilux Overdrive) was able to follow the tracks of the master but also count on the calm efficiency of his own co-driver, Frenchman Sébastien De Launay, to beat off the attacks coming from Mathieu Serradori and Fabian Lurquin (Buggy CR6 SRT), victims of a puncture in the middle of the special. While the Chinese driver Han Wei (Buggy Geely SMG) and the Frenchman crew of Pélichet and Larroque (Buggy Optimus Raid Lynx) complete the day’s top 5, problems with Liu Kun’s (Buggy Hanwei SMG), wishbone put the two crews into a close fight for the 2nd place, 1 hour behind Al-Atiyah.

**Eric Van Loon (P-B/Toyota Hilux Overdrive) 2nd :** *“I remember the Gobi Desert being beautiful but not this magnificent. We drove in a superb special. The dunes were incredibly high. In certain places we were incapable of following the tracks of the bikes all the way to the top and had to make our own route. The camel grass was hard on the car... and on my neck. I thank my co-driver for the excellent job he did today. I have no hesitation in saying he is the best navigator I’ve had by my side in the last 12 years!”*

## Trucks: Viazovich cracks, Shibalov bites

His tough determination forces respect. In the lead since the start in Irkutsk, last Monday, Siarhey Viazovich (MAZ) has fought off a Kamaz-Master Armada that has rarely been tested to such a degree on a race that they are used to dominating. The driver from Minsk started these last three stages with the firm intention of continuing that resistance but unfortunately the first dunes broke his dreams in two.

Rolling off a high crest, the red giant came to an abrupt halt. Falling on its wheels it looked like they would be able to carry on their way but a closer inspection revealed that the roll-cage had given way – impossible to repair. The brave Belarusian was forced to retire.

Suddenly the way was open for the ‘Kamaz boys’, with a red carpet unrolling before them over the infinite dunes. And it was the youngest, Anton Shibalov who seized the occasion, posting his first victory on this rally, following steering problems for Andrei Karginov, his most threatening rival overall.

**Anton Shibalov (RUS/Kamaz-Master) 1st:** *“On crossing a dune I saw Viazovich stopped over to my left. The crew seemed ok and I couldn’t see any damage to the truck. We carried on our way without taking any risks. The dunes were much more abrupt than on previous years. The nose of the truck hit every crest before jumping over the obstacle. Fortunately, we didn’t have to stop.”*





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## STAT OF THE DAY

**981.37**

When a rally crosses three different countries, in the case of the 2019 SILK WAY RALLY, Siberia, Mongolia and China, it is inevitable that there is going to be some road sections between terrain suitable to run timed selective sections. For cars and trucks it is not the most enjoyable part of rally-raid, but at least the crews can have a chat, or sit back and enjoy the scenery roll by. For bikes however it is a whole different story. Rally bikes are narrowly focused machines designed to be ridden very fast over difficult terrain. On the road, restricted to local speed limits, they are something approaching torture.

Which is why the motorcycle federation, the FIM, in accordance with the organisers, have permitted bike competitors to load their machines onto their assistance vehicles for much of the liaison, which has brought them from the end of the last special in Mongolia to the start of the first one in the Gobi Desert. That's a grand total of 981.37 kilometres of what could be quite literally be described as a 'pain in the bum' that the bike riders have so far been spared.

## ROAD BOOK

**Tomorrow: Stage 9 - ALASHAN - JIAYUGUAN: "Life in sand" - Distance: 501,20KM - Selective section: 290,30KM**

The ninth stage starts from the finish point of previous day. It will be a fast and beautiful route, mostly set along sandy roads. This is the moment when one gets to admire amazing fixed dunes of Gobi Desert. The next part on your way to finish is slower, as bumps and dunettes are mixed here with dry river beds, but the last kilometers will be very fast.



## FAITHFUL PARTNERS

### GAZPROM, the rally's main partner

The Russian global energy company PJSC Gazprom has been engaged on the event as a main partner since the first edition of the Silk Way Rally in 2009.

### TOYOTA, « official vehicles » of the organization

Toyota Hilux for the forth time already are the Silk Way Rally official cars.

Because of their unique design and capabilities, TOYOTA all-terrain vehicles have proved their extraordinary resistance during the various reconnaissance and on the rally. Toyota is producing vehicles that you can rely on in any situation. Distinguishing characteristics offroad, endurance, an amazing ability to adapt to harsh road conditions and climate.... Main idea is that Land Cruiser Prado, Land Cruiser 200, Fortuner and Hilux tackle the challenges delegated to them.

### SIBUR, technical partner

PJSC SIBUR is the largest integrated petrochemicals company in Russia and the technical partner for innovative materials. They are sponsoring a special award for "impressive vehicle reliability and excellent skills demonstrated under extreme circumstances".





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## **GAZPROM NEFT, official fuel partner**

Gazprom will be filling up the Silk Way Rally's vehicles along the route with the company's branded diesel fuel, *Diesel Opti*. OPTI fuel performed excellently in extreme conditions, and our continuing cooperation is the best proof.

## **GAZPROMBANK, financial partner**

Gazprombank is one of the largest multifunctional banks in Russia.

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