

Aliyyah Koloc shows strong pace amid issues to complete maiden Dakar Rally outing

Aliyyah Koloc reached the end of the Dakar Rally after a gruelling 15 days of action in Saudi Arabia, finishing 33rd in the T3 Lightweight Prototype category.

TALLIN, ESTONIA, January 17, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 45th edition of the Dakar was one of the longest and most demanding in recent years, with over 5000 kilometres on the agenda for the crews across 14 stages. Traversing a variety of surfaces, from sand and rocks to dried-out salt lakes and mammoth dunes, Aliyyah's first experience of the iconic rally raid was a character-building exercise.

Competing alongside regular navigator Stéphane Duplé in the Buggyra Academy ZM Can-Am, Aliyyah – who was recently crowned FIA Middle East Cup for Cross-Country Bajas T3 champion – finished a respectable 33rd on her debut after an up-and-down event.

"Of course, it's not the result we wanted, but it's all experience," said Aliyyah Koloc at the end of the rally. "Especially not being able to start the last stage due to some car problems, that's not how we wanted to finish after such a hard two weeks, but that's motorsport and I wouldn't change anything."

Buggyra ZM team principal Martin Koloc said: "We have been working the whole of last year to get ready for the Dakar and we went through two and a half weeks of hardship, so it's quite emotional at the finish!"



Week 1 (Stages 1-8)

Having arrived in Saudi Arabia just after Christmas, Aliyyah and the team kicked off their maiden Dakar attempt with a short prologue on New Year's Day around the event's initial base, Sea Camp.

Aliyyah placed 43rd, after suffering a broken driveshaft which cost her and Duplé nearly two minutes to the overall fastest time, but the prologue only set the road order for the following days' 367km first proper test of the rally. Unfortunately, the next two stages gave Aliyyah a taste of what the Dakar was really about: engine issues stemming from the second stage continued into day three and she was unable to complete the stage.

That gave her a regulation 36-hour penalty, dropping out of contention for a top 10 finish, but Aliyyah's determination did not waiver and she continued her learning curve. Proof of this came on the fourth stage, after she set a superb seventh-quickest time in T3 and moved back up to 40th in the overall classification.

A roll on stage five proved to be temporary blip in an otherwise positive day as Aliyyah ended up 13th fastest, with two more top 20 stage times coming before a well-deserved rest day in the Saudi capital of Riyadh on January 9th.

"Coming here, I knew it would be difficult, but you never really know until you actually try it," reflected Aliyyah. "I can tell you that it's really, really difficult. In my 18 years of living, this was the hardest two weeks of my life! Physically I was OK, but mentally it was difficult. We had a bunch of car problems but you try to be positive, and actually in the second week it went a lot better. I never wanted to give up but continuing after all of these problems was difficult."

Week 2 (Stages 9-14)

The second week of the Dakar served up a local delicacy, namely sand. Dunes and more dunes



were on the itinerary for the crews and Aliyyah put her opening- week troubles behind her to deliver consistent performances as the event headed to the famous Empty Quarter.

Having climbed up to 35th in the overall T3 standings, Aliyyah was never outside the top 20 in the stage classifications for the next four days. Leaving aside a slight rear axle problem on stage 10, Aliyyah enjoyed a far more positive time in the dunes, setting the 13th quickest time on stage 11 and then breaking into the top 10 again the following day.

But the Dakar can be cruel and engine issues struck again on the penultimate stage, costing Aliyyah and Stéphane more than an hour. The team desperately tried to rectify the problem on the morning of the final stage but, despite fixing the issue, Aliyyah missed her start time and so was unable to complete the last special from Al-Hofuf to Dammam.

Nevertheless, Aliyyah and Stéphane were classified 33rd in the overall classification, a strong result for their very first participation in the world's most challenging rally.

"The two days in the dunes of the Empty Quarter were my favourite," added Aliyyah. "I love the dunes and have a lot of experience there: they were very big and challenging, so really fun. Over the past two weeks, this was the most I have ever driven, so I think I have become more mentally fit because you have to stay positive while everyone is really tired. It was a good mental challenge because I have a short patience! I also learned so much more about the car; I have been practising for the Dakar for three years but when you are in these tough situations in the middle of nowhere and you have to fix the car, it really sinks in. I learned a lot about the car and myself and I'm honestly surprised how I managed!"

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