



[WWW.RUSTSPORTS.COM](http://WWW.RUSTSPORTS.COM)

 [@RUSTSPORTS](https://twitter.com/RUSTSPORTS)

 [/RUSTSPORTS](https://www.facebook.com/RUSTSPORTS)

 [/RUSTSPORTS](https://www.instagram.com/RUSTSPORTS)



*DAKAR SPECIAL*

## RUST's GUIDE

The route, the riders –  
all you need to know

## POINT BREAK

When rivalry goes to  
the extreme

## 1979 RELOADED

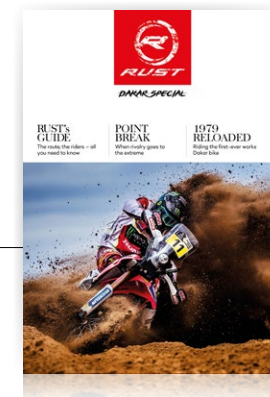
Riding the first-ever works  
Dakar bike





# Contents

## RUST DAKAR PREVIEW



06

**Editorial**  
It's called The Great Race



08

**Gallery**  
Mountains and motorcycle



12

**The Route**  
Two weeks of moto-hell it would seem



26

**Sam Sunderland**  
What it takes to win





Motorcycle Bluetooth®  
Communication Systems  
& Action-Cameras



## SENA 30K

Talk to up to 16 rider for a range up to 8 km (min. of 5 rider) with SENAs MESH-Technology. Additionally you can pair your 30K up to 3 other headsets via Bluetooth 4.1. It supports Audio Multitasking, Advanced Noise Control, Universal Intercom, FM Radio and much more.



### 10C

By combining SENAs global Bluetooth leadership, innovative headset devices and camera technology into one powerful setup, the SENA 10C is a truly complete solution.



### 10S

Talk to four riders with Bluetooth 4.1, enhanced speakers, increased intercom distance of 1 mile, FM radio and smart-phone app.



### 20S EVO

The SENA 20S EVO helps you enjoy your ride to the fullest by keeping you in touch with up to eight of your buddies, up to 1.2 miles away.



# Contents

## RUST DAKAR PREVIEW

36

**The Runners**  
Our pick of the  
leading riders



56

**XT500**  
The legend that  
launched legends

68

**Duel**  
Neveu vs Auriol  
in 1987 – was this  
Dakar's toughest  
combat?







# THE GREAT RACE

**W**elcome to our 2018 Dakar Special. This 40th edition of the Rally looks set to be another stunner, with more riders than ever in contention for the win. The same goes for the manufacturers. KTM vs. Honda may be the headlining contest, but both need to keep a very wary eye over the rest: both Yamaha and Sherco have shown winning capability and there are more besides.

We've decided to turn the clock back twice in this issue, back to 1987 for a classic duel and further still to 1978-79 to when it all began. There was a romance to those earliest Dakars – more adventure than race – and being privileged to ride a replica of one of the very first bikes really did connect me to the feeling back then. Disco fought with punk in the music charts, Europe was giving way to American invaders in 500GP – these were not innocent times – but the purity of the endeavour back in '79, to fight your way over 10,000km of deserts for nearly three weeks, that really was something in that pre-GPS era.

Today's Dakar is more racy, for sure. But the challenge never diminishes, the organisers see to that. And I love that we can follow the race in real time (when the Dakar website works). We can follow the race intimately, can track our favourites, and virtually the whole world can now see the daily film footage (remember at the beginning it was a very French thing). And Dakar really comes alive to the modern digital SLR camera – the images today can astound, as this special issue will reveal.

It is still The Great Race when it comes to motorsport. And while professionalism has changed it, while commercial interests and bullcrap media mean the bivouacs aren't the wonderfully eclectic melting pots they once were, it's still an amazing spectacle. It is still a very personal thing, too: the riders still make or break the outcome, not the manufacturers. It makes January a very special month.

I hope you enjoy reading our guide, and I trust it'll enhance your Dakar experience. 📺

JB





## THE LONG RIDE

Dakar is the big race, it is the long distances, the long-long-long days. This fantastic image kind of sums that up. It's from the 2017 Dakar, and for Pela Renet the finish isn't over the mountain in front of him, probably not the one after that either. Some days you've got to put in the hours and be patient.

**Image:** Husqvarna / Marcin Kin





## THE DAKAR BIKE

Have Dakar racers come full circle? In this issue we've test ridden a replica of a 1979 Dakar racer, a Yamaha 500cc single-cylinder four-stroke weighing about 150-kilos before fuel. After that first Dakar the racers got bigger, much bigger, until the organisers, trying to keep a check on safety, forced them to be smaller again. So this year's works Yamaha is a 450cc single-cylinder four-stroke, weighing about 145kg before fuel. And the mass-centralising 33-litre pannier fuel tanks and lightweight carbon fibre instrument tower mean today's rally bikes handle more like an enduro bike again. There is a beauty to it, a rugged beauty.

Image: Yamaha



# SAND STORM



## THE DAKAR RALLY ROUTE 2018

The 40th Dakar Rally looks set to be a humdinger. Yep, the toughest race just got tougher...

Words: Georgia Wells

Images: KTM / Husqvarna / Honda / Yamaha / Future7Media ▶







**J**anuary 6, 2018 will mark the start of the 40th edition of the Dakar Rally, and if anything this number seems lower than expected for a race with such a rich history and so many incredible stories. Surprisingly, however, this race will mark the tenth in South America. And more than ever, even to the fans and riders who can remember the classic Paris-Dakar route and the fascinating and famous stops throughout Africa, South America really feels like 'home' now. And despite the occasional rumour that a new continent could be on the cards in the future, it still feels like there's plenty to explore throughout Latin America.





## TO START: PERU

In 2018, Peru is back on the route after five years absence. Unpredictable climatic conditions in the country, and the organisers' desire to venture into new places, had left Peru sidelined despite fantastic stages there in the past, including those alongside the Nazca lines and Lake Titicaca. This year, the race will start in Peru's capital, Lima, and it's sure to be one hell of a send off for the 167 strong biker entry. People in Peru turn out in their millions to welcome the Dakar circus, and the competitors will be treated to a vibrant almost carnival atmosphere, something they'll need as the route looks set to be one of the toughest of recent years.



## SAND – FIVE DAYS OF HELL?

On the second day of the rally the riders will immediately be plunged into sand and, you guessed it, dunes. In fact, for the first five days of the event the riders will not only be in the sand, but also on completely new territory. It's an incredibly daunting start to the race and a high attrition rate can be expected from the outset. On stage five the riders will also be forced to battle against one the Dakar's newest phenomena; high altitude dunes.









### BOLIVIAN MARATHON

On the sixth day the riders will arrive in La Paz in beautiful Bolivia, where they will have their well-deserved rest day. It's been a few years since the event has had such a dramatically difficult start and it is unlikely we'll have a clear favourite by the halfway point as experience and careful riding, rather than all-out speed or attacking, will be the approach for the opening five days.

On the plus side, most of the specials in the opening week of the rally are relatively short... under 400km! But, just in case we haven't lost a third of the field by the rest day, the organisers have decided to treat the competitors to a horrendously challenging marathon for stages seven and eight. This means zero assistance from their teams, even for the factory riders, and a remote (usually quite basic) bivouac.

And how on earth do you make the marathon even more difficult? Well, you make the second leg the longest special on the whole rally! The run from the now infamous Uyuni to Tupiza will total 498km of competitive kilometres. The riders could well struggle to keep their concentration as high altitudes and exhaustion start to fry their brains.



## A HEROES' RETURN

Those who make it as far as the start of stage nine will be heroes in their own right. Only as the rally reaches Argentina for the closing five stages of the event will the competitors at last get to wave goodbye to the dunes and enter more familiar territory. Fast farm tracks, twisty valley passes, and rocky riverbeds will make for frightening (high speed) viewing as the riders attempt to make a final push for glory. Chuck in another marathon over stages 11 and 12 and they will likely be suffering both physical and mental pain as Argentina's terrain offers zero margin for error, and the end of the race becomes tantalisingly close.

The penultimate stage provides a proverbial sting in the tail with a total 904km, and even the final run to the finish on stage 14 promises no let up.

A reliable bike, camaraderie among competitors, and co-operation between teammates could make a hell of a difference in this race...



DAKAR  
2018





# THE DAKAR IN NUMBERS



40<sup>TH</sup>  
edition

9000<sub>KM</sub> 5 DAYS  
above 3000m

3 countries:  
Peru, Bolivia  
& Argentina

142 solo competitors 14 stages 4500<sub>KM</sub>  
50 quad competitors timed specials

2 marathon stages  
(back-to-back  
stages, no assistance)



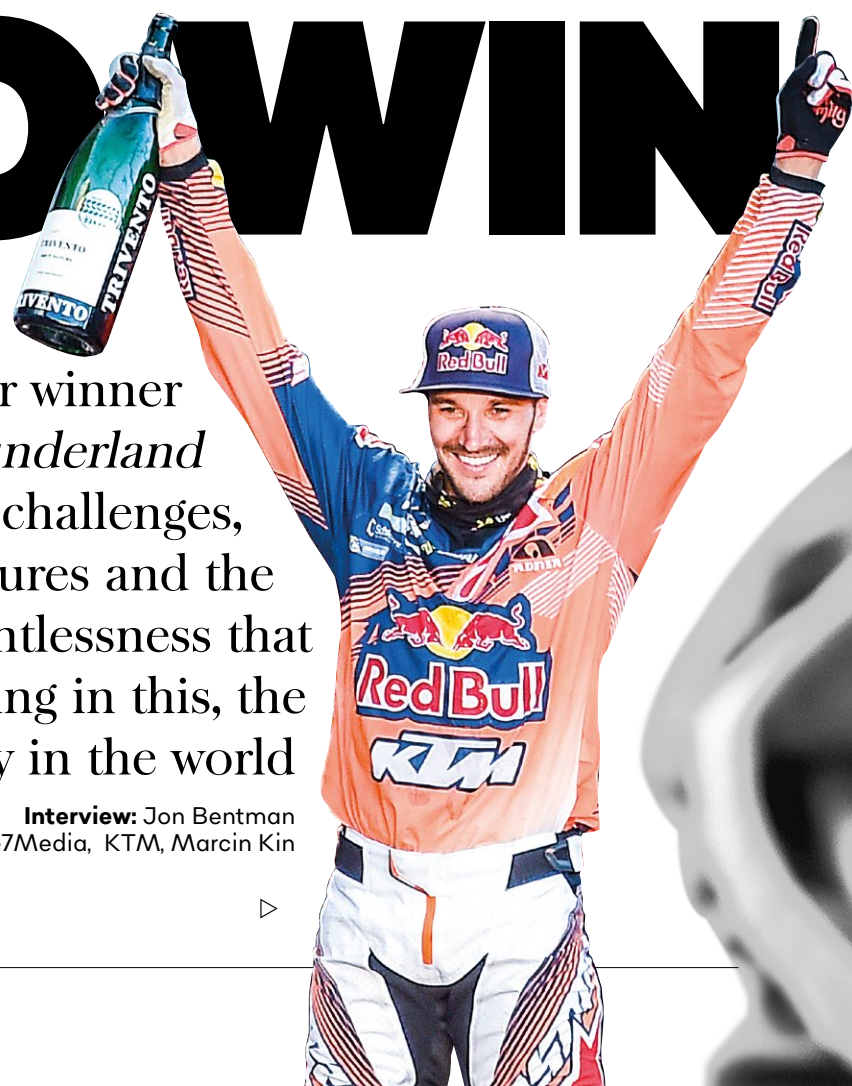


# SAM SUNDERLAND WHAT IT TAKES TO WIN

2017 Dakar winner  
*Sam Sunderland*  
explains the challenges,  
the pressures and the  
sheer relentlessness that  
is competing in this, the  
biggest rally in the world

Interview: Jon Bentman

Images: Future7Media, KTM, Marcin Kin







**RUST: IN 2017 YOU GOT YOUR DAKAR WIN AFTER YEARS OF TRYING AND NO FINISHES. IT'S BEEN SAID YOU GOT THAT WIN BECAUSE YOU WERE A DIFFERENT RIDER IN 2017.**

**SS:** If you look at the facts, I've crashed out of only one Dakar, the others were mechanical failures or a non-start due to injury. So while that's in essence a one-in-four finishing rate – and while it's never good not to finish – three of them were a little bit out of my hands. In between I've twice finished second in the world championship – not many people recognise that – and that's a five-round series and each round is a five-day race, so I got through them all two years in a row just fine. Yet I've definitely had the image of the crazy young motocross guy who's going too fast – often upside down! But, if I'm honest, maybe I have changed a bit too, I've tried to stay calm and learn from my mistakes. Obviously going from winning in Morocco and then breaking my femur and having to sit at home watching the 2016 Dakar on TV was wrath for the mind – so yeah, that helped change me in that sense; I've tried to stay a bit more calm.

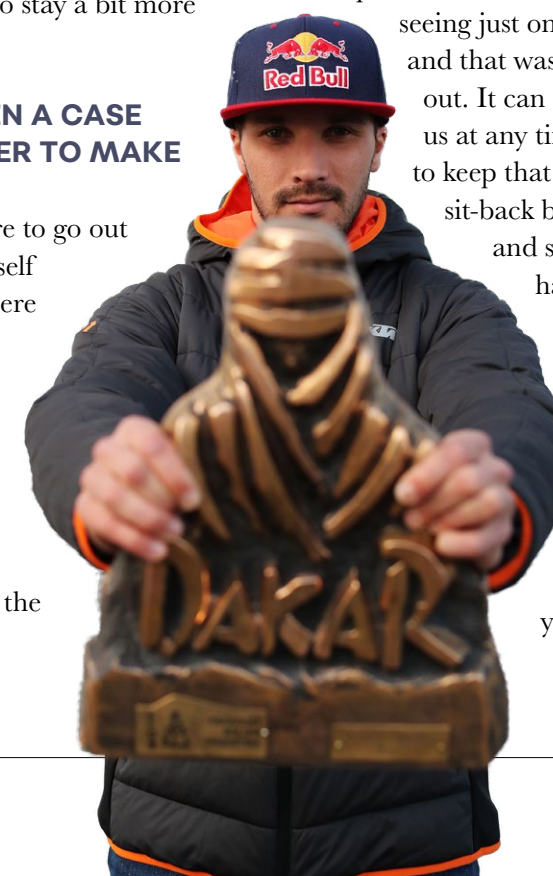
**RUST: HAS IT BEEN A CASE OF GOING SLOWER TO MAKE THE FINISH?**

**SS:** I think if you were to go out there and say to yourself 'I'll ride at a speed where there's no chance I'll have a crash, then you'll be 25 minutes behind by the end of the day. The sport has evolved to the point where you are riding so fast that the

risk is there, and it's a fine line how you manage that. To go 1% faster you take on 20% more risk so you're at that kind of level. I've tried to learn from my mistakes, and you kind of do that naturally when injuries hurt so bad or when things are mentally so tough – and I've experienced both of them – so for 2017 I really tried to stay calm that first week until we reached the rest day. At the start there are like 10 dudes who could win, but by the rest day that can be down to four, so that was part of the plan.

**RUST: A FEW JOURNALISTS SEEMED TO IMPLY YOUR TEAMMATE TOBY PRICE HAD GONE TOO HARD, TAKEN TOO MANY RISKS BEFORE HE CRASHED OUT IN 2017. WAS HE BEING RECKLESS?**

**SS:** It's not like that at all, he wasn't going off like a firecracker, he wasn't trying to show people 'I'm here, this is what I can do'. The fact is, in Dakar everybody is at risk at some point, to some extent, and I think it's a fine line. In the end Toby missed seeing one stone and you might pass 3000 stones in one day. He missed seeing just one stone in a riverbed and that was the one that caught him out. It can happen to any one of us at any time and I think it's good to keep that in mind. It's easy to sit-back behind a computer screen and say 'he was pushing too hard', or 'he was stressed because he won the year before', in the end when you're there you're trying to do your best. Nobody wants to crash, nobody wants to get hurt; it's a fine line that you're treading all day.







**RUST: HAS DAKAR GOT FASTER OVER RECENT YEARS?**

**SS:** Yeah, it's a completely different race these days. You have so many world champions from enduro, motocross and everything else coming into it that the speed has gone up and up. And it's all kinds of younger guys coming in, perhaps willing to take on more risk. As well, we're riding different types of stages now to what it was then. And with a much greater depth of talent – not to take anything away from the top guys of the past, they were obviously huge talents, but now I think it's a lot deeper. There were maybe three guys who could win in the last ten years, now I think there are ten guys who could win. And with that, when there is that many guys who can win then the level goes up massively; everyone has to push that bit extra.

**RUST: THE 450cc DAKAR BIKE SEEMS TO HAVE MATURED – FASTER AND LONG-LASTING...**

**SS:** Its incredible to think what a 450cc engine can do now: 10,000km over 12 days in that kind of environment, they are really strong now. And you don't manage the bike at all, unless it's the last two days and you have a lead then maybe you start to be conscious of it. The rest of the time you ride it as fast as you can go and if its 40 minutes on the limiter in top gear then its 40 minutes on the limiter in top gear, you don't back it off a bit to save the engine. We're lucky we don't have to ride like that any more; the reliability is there and proven. So it's more pressure on you – but it's a good pressure to have.

**RUST: HONDA IS ALWAYS KTM'S FIERCEST RIVAL. AFTER LAST YEAR'S REFUEL CALAMITY THAT RESULTED IN BIG TIME PENALTIES**

**THEY CLAIMED A 'MORAL VICTORY' OVER YOU BASED ON THEIR RIDERS' END-OF-RALLY PERFORMANCE. DID THAT ANGER YOU?**

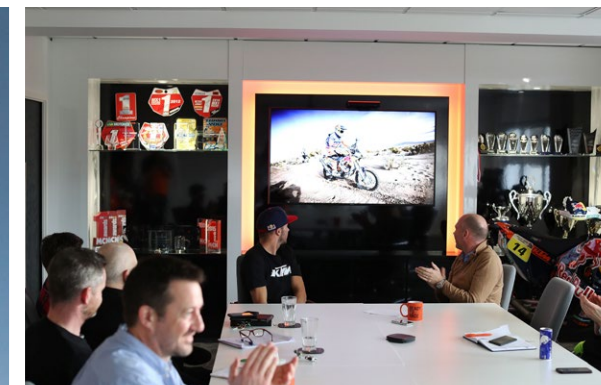
**SS:** In a way you have your own thoughts on it, and I know what the truth is, but at the same time I appreciate they're trying to do a job, working with a massive budget, and when they have days like that it's not good for them and so they have to say what they say to make themselves feel okay. For me and for my team, and for a lot of people, it was clear what the situation



was, and it wasn't only me who was riding a different race once they got that time penalty, everyone was. It doesn't make sense to fight for stage wins when there's no need. At the Tour de France you don't see Chris Froome fighting for the sprints every day, that's not how you win the tour, and it's the same thing with the Dakar.

**RUST: TALKING OF BIG BUDGETS AND BIG EXPECTATIONS, WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEARING THE PRESSURE OF LEADING THE DAKAR?**





**SS:** It was incredible, I knew I was feeling the pressure and I was trying to manage it the best I could and when people kept saying 'so are you thinking about the win?' as early as on day ten or 11, I was telling them 'no, no I'm not thinking about it at all'. But come on, of course you are! It's something you've been working toward for the past seven years, something you gone through a bunch of injuries for, something you've worked all year towards, all the sacrifices – of course that thought is there. But you try to tell people you're not thinking about it to try and convince yourself. I think you just manage it the best way you can, but when I crossed the

finish line it was just incredible, it felt really amazing. So much work, so many ups and downs finally paying off, it was a relief.

**RUST: DOES THE PRESSURE BUILD THE CLOSER YOU GET TO THE END?**

**SS:** It never lets off, at least. I guess if say Marc Marquez is going into the last round of MotoGP and all he has to do is finish in the top-10 then he can go into that round knowing he's done, of course it's never done until it's done, but he can just maintain and take it easy. But the way the navigation was in the 2017 Dakar you could make a mistake so easily so you could lose your

advantage so quickly, so the pressure is bigger because of that. In Dakar you can never relax – there's no 'it's done unless I have a mechanical', no 'it's done unless something freaky happens'. It's never done until you cross that line, it's too easy to make a mistake. That makes it harder.

**RUST: SO WAS IT A MONKEY OFF YOUR BACK? COULD YOU ENJOY THE SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT?**

**SS:** When people say as a works rider you're living the dream... well, you are but it's not how people think it is. It's a lot of work, a lot of commitment, a lot of people relying on you, putting faith into your riding and your

work. You definitely feel the expectation and pressure – all the time. The pressure never leaves – first you want to win a stage, then you want to win a rally, then when you win that rally you go to the next and what do you know? You're expected to win again. So that expectation is always there and it grows with each win. And now I've won the biggest rally there is, next time there'll be the expectation to do it again. That work, that expectation, never ends, it never goes away, it just gets more. But for as long as I want to win more than I feel the pressure then I don't mind. Right now I want to win more than I feel the pressure of someone telling me I need to win. 🍀





6 IN DAKAR YOU CAN  
NEVER RELAX –  
IT'S NEVER DONE  
UNTIL YOU CROSS  
THAT LINE  
SAM SUNDERLAND





Words: Georgia Wells

Images: KTM / Husqvarna / Honda / Yamaha / Future7Media



# THE DAKAR RALLY 2018 THE RACERS

The Dakar again looks wide open. It's anyone's game, or is it? ►



# RED BULL *KTM Factory Racing*

**H**aving won the Dakar Rally for the last 16 years, Red Bull KTM Factory Racing obviously come into the 2018 race as favourites. However, it hasn't been plain sailing for the Austrian squad as two of their five riders have been injured and have fought to be fully fit for this year's race.

After a brilliant win in 2016, Toby Price checked out of the 2017 Dakar early, crashing heavily on the fourth stage and badly breaking his thigh. But the tough Aussie is fully healed up now and ready to attack to the max (which seems to be his style) once again. KTM's home boy (Austrian), Matthias Walkner will be hoping to go head-to-head with Price; he finished second last year and celebrates a deal signed earlier this year which sees him stay with KTM until 2020. Perhaps the most dependable member of the team is actually Laia Sanz – while the 'Queen of Off-Road Racing' is unlikely to win the race, she is incredibly consistent, having finished all of the seven Dakars she has started. Sanz has won the Women's class four times in a row and finished in the top 16 overall three times, including three top-eight stage finishes. Laia says her aim is the top 15 again in 2018, but one of these years the Catalan superstar is going to spring a surprise and find herself well within the Top 10.



Sam Sunderland





Completing KTM's incredibly strong line-up are Sam Sunderland and Antoine Meo. Sunderland's exhilarating win last January, when he became the first Brit to win the Dakar, brought a lot of attention to the sport as a whole but also put the spotlight on Sam after several years of bad luck and disappointing results. The likeable lad, who originally hails from Poole in the UK but now lives in the deserts of Dubai, will be hoping to prove that his emphatic win last year was no fluke, and the thousands of fans who have followed his spectacular social media photos throughout the year will be backing him all the way.

Meo has not had an easy run of things since his Dakar debut in 2016, where he finished an excellent seventh place. The Frenchman suffered a huge crash just days before the end of the rally, but he gritted his teeth to cross the finish line. It became clear afterwards that the injuries to his hands were far worse than anyone realised – in fact they would keep him out of



Antoine Meo



Matthias Walkner



Toby Price



**BELOW:** Laia Sanz & Luciano Benavides



action for over a year and he missed the 2017 Dakar. There was doubt over whether he would come back, the psychological damage clearly having an impact on the five-time world enduro champion. But finally, Meo has been able to silence the doubters with an excellent fourth place in the Rallye Du Maroc in October this year. Meo is back and ready to race, and as any enduro fan will tell you, an on-form Meo is a dangerous one. With riders like these, KTM seem almost guaranteed a 17th win!







Andrew Short

# ROCKSTAR *Energy* *Husqvarna*

**S**ibling team Rockstar Energy Husqvarna are often strong contenders to go head-to-head with the orange squad but for 2018 things will be a little different with only half of their regular team able to take to the start line on January 6. Pierre-Alexandre Renet, left a successful enduro career a couple of years ago, determined to become a top level rally rider. But during his Dakar debut in 2016 he knocked himself out cold, leaving Laia Sanz (the first rider to find him) shocked and fearing the worst. A year later 'Pela' made good, finishing a superb seventh. He was finally ready to attack the Dakar, but disaster has struck once again for the talented Frenchman; during the Atacama Rally in August of this year Pela hit a hidden pothole at 150km/h. He was catapulted through the air and woke up two days later in hospital in Santiago, having been placed in an artificial coma. "I'm used to hospitals," he declared, stoically. But his injuries were serious. Pela had fractured a few cervical vertebrae, and needed 20 screws to put his arm back together. "It may sound strange but I am fortunate in my bad luck... this situation is bad but not as bad as it could be, my helmet was completely destroyed and it was a fast crash."



Sadly for the Frenchman, and for the sport in general, these injuries were too serious for him to recover in time for the 2018 Dakar. And so Husqvarna have drafted in American rookie Andrew Short, yes the former AMA supercross star, as his replacement. This is Short's first year in rally, and he's publicly stated he'll play himself in carefully.

So for Husky, all eyes – and hopes – will be on Pablo Quintanilla. The South American star came very close to toppling Sam Sunderland last year before he was forced to retire with dizziness. And he has back-to-back FIM Rallies Championship titles (2016 & 2017). Many people have picked Pablo as a favourite for the last few years, but sadly the likeable Chilean will not be able to enjoy the exaltation of victory on home turf as Chile's stunning stages are sidelined for yet another year. Although the team are obviously hurting to be starting without Pela, it could actually play to their advantage having just one top rider to focus on in Quintanilla, and having a stand-in team-mate who ought to be happy to play the 'water carrier' role could help, too.

Pablo Quintanilla







## MONSTER *Energy Honda*

**A**s was ever the case, Dakar 2018 will see the continuation of Japan's quest for gold. The last time Honda won was way back in 1989 (Gilles Lalay on the NXR800!) and year-on-year they seem to come out with a stronger, more reliable bike and a stronger line-up.



For the 40th Dakar, HRC have thrown as many 'big guns' as possible towards the startline – in stark contrast to Husqvarna's tiny team. Honda have a couple of proven riders such as the ever-reliable Paulo 'Speedy' Gonçalves and Joan 'Bang Bang' Barreda. And three 'improving' or up-and-coming riders in the form of Michael Metge, Ricky Brabec and Argentina's dark horse Kevin Benavides.

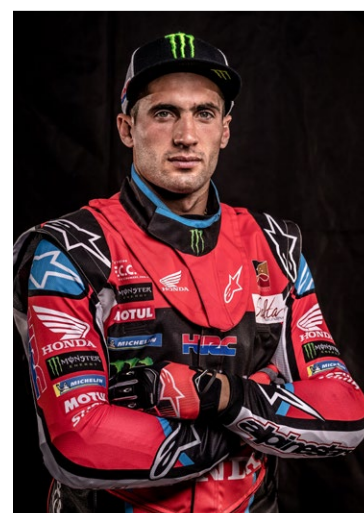
All five riders are capable of top 10-15 finishes and Barreda, Benavides and Gonçalves have the pace to win. But while so many people across the world would love to see Paulo win after so many years of heroics and self-sacrifice, or Joan win due to his spectacular riding style and wild antics, or Kevin win as an enduro-to-rally convert who would be close to home for Cordoba's frenetic closing ceremony, it seems hard to imagine after so many years of orange domination.



Paulo Gonçalves



Ricky Brabec



Kevin Benavides



Michael Metge





# YAMALUBE *Yamaha*

**O**ver in the blue corner, Yamaha will be aiming for their first victory since 1998 with a deceptively strong line-up of Franco Caimi, Xavier de Soultrait, Rodney Faggotter, and of course, Adrien Van Beveren.

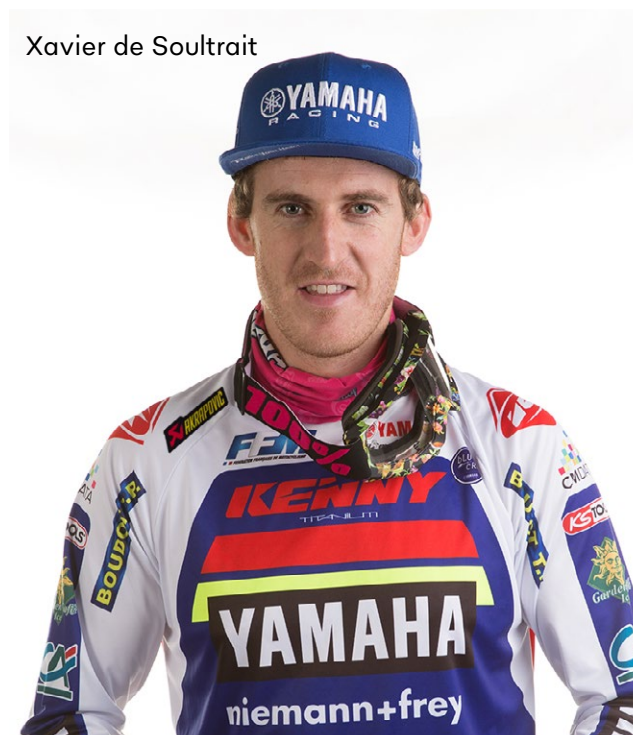


The French sand specialist Van Beveren will be very much the leading light for the team, especially as this year's route contains so many sand stages, but Caimi and de Soultrait will also be hoping to push the top 10. As the race draws on they, along with Faggotter, may be asked to make sacrifices in order to allow a spectacularly quick Van Beveren to build on his fourth place of last year.

Franco Caimi



Xavier de Soultrait



Rodney Faggotter



Adrien Van Beveren







Lyndon Poskitt

#### THE OTHERS

But even if KTM do take the top spot once again, there's no guarantee it'll be a factory rider at the helm. The Spanish run Hi-moinsa KTM team are extremely professional and possess some excellent riders for 2018. Ivan Cervantes and Gerard Farres are podium contenders at the very least and Marc Sola and Dani Oliveras will aim to stick in behind their competitive compatriots. Rosa Romero and Antonio Ramos will represent the squad from lower down the field, ready to help if needs be, or in Rosa's case, ready to do battle with Laia Sanz for the Women's crown.

There are also a number of excellent former enduro riders who could throw in some surprises; such as Alessandro Botturi, Stefan Svitko, Jacopo Cerutti and Olivier Pain to name but a few. And those riding for 'newer' Dakar brands such as Juan Pedrero on Sherco, Johnny Aubert and Jonathan Barragan on Gas Gas, and Oriol Mena and Joaquim Rodrigues on Hero (an Indo-German offshoot of Speedbrain). It's all to play for!

#### MALLE MOTO

Of course there are also those who will be heading to the Dakar with no hope of

winning the 'main' class, but who re-mortgage their houses and stop at nothing short of selling a kidney to afford the entry fee, just to be there and experience it. There are those who will pitch up with just a bike and box to take on the unbelievably tough, zero-assistance, Malle Moto class. One of these heroic riders is Lyndon Poskitt, a Brit who has made a name for himself via an online documentary series named 'Races to Places'. For 2018 Poskitt will be filming every aspect of life as a Malle Moto rider, and we at RUST urge you to follow him and his competitors as they take on this mammoth task – it will give you a whole different take on what it's really like to race the Dakar.

Perhaps more than ever, this year's route will challenge even the fastest and most experienced riders, from the new dunes ready to catch them out at the beginning, to coping with the marathon stages, to keeping calm on the pacy run into the finish. The eventual winner will need to be truly multi-faceted, as well as fortunate, in order to tame the 2018 edition of this incredible race! And even as mere fans of this legendary event, which you can love one moment and hate the next, we are in for a rollercoaster of a ride. Hold on tight! 🏍️

# IT'S MAKING YOUR OWN ADVENTURE



We understand the excitement of looking for that next adventure; planning, researching and booking your latest trip. If it's a brand new destination or a well-travelled route, when it comes to insuring your bike, we go the extra mile for our riders, meaning you can follow the tracks and **enjoy your adventure.**

- We search our panel of insurers to find you our best price for the cover you need
- 90-day EU cover as standard
- Expert 24-hour claims service
- Get discounts on kit, gear, travel and bike experiences with Bennetts Rewards\*



#ItsWhatWeDo

Visit [Bennetts.co.uk](https://www.bennetts.co.uk)

or call 0330 018 5943 for a quote

\*All offers subject to Terms & Conditions. Offer subject to change.



# WHERE IT ALL STARTED

The Dakar Rally is celebrating its 40th edition in 2018. So we've rolled back the years to the very first, to see where – and on what – it all began

words: Jon Bentman images: Stuart Collins

**B**ack in the late 1970s the desert rallying scene was in its infancy, and it was then a very French thing. For the French it was a very natural adventurous step to cross the Mediterranean and venture into their (former) African colonies.

They'd been doing it for decades, informally. But in the late 1970s the concept of the adventurous race really came alive. The idea of a 10,000km stage-race across the deserts of Northern Africa certainly caught the French imagination.

That rallying was still an adventure, more than a race, can be seen by the hotch-potch entry for that first Dakar Rally back in 1979 (nearly entirely privateers), which included a fair range of romantics peppered among the racers, including a chain-smoking journalist on a BMW R65 complete with screen and panniers, another hopeful on nothing more than a Honda XL125S, not to mention the usual array of humble Renault 4 and Peugeot

504 runabouts in the car class – there was even a Ford Transit.

The first winner, overall and moto class, was a 23-year-old Frenchman, a former French trials champion, Cyril Neveu. He later spoke of that first Dakar not in terms of the competition but the adventure: “It was more a human adventure than anything else. It was a challenge that was to discover Africa first of all, by the motorcycle, and by means of competition.

“So there were several challenges at the end, the discovery of a continent that I did not know, that fascinated me and after that the challenge of a victory since I came from a sporting environment.”

That's not to say the very first Dakar rally wasn't competitive. At the front of the pack was the very first works rally team, Sonauto Yamaha, who bought an array of fast racers, some from motocross, some from trials. They were all riding Yamaha's popular trail bike of the day, the XT500.







#### DAKAR'S ONLY PRIVATEER WIN

The team, led by Yamaha boss Jean Claude Olivier was expected to win. But their tactics were their undoing. They rode fast and they rode together. When one made a navigational error, they all did and this happened as early as the third stage, when they lost five hours on the stage and lost a further seven hours in penalties. Subsequent fast riding did nothing to pull back their disadvantage, instead it ended in big crashes that sidelined two of their top riders, Olivier and Rudy Positek. Eventually, teammate Gilles Comte placed a Sonauto XT on the second step of the podium in Dakar – by means of steady work. He'd punctured and lost much time on the very first stage and so hadn't ridden with the fast-n-furious Sonauto pack. He didn't ascribe to the speed tactic, like Neveu for him it was technical skills and long-haul strategy that worked.

Neveu won without taking a single stage victory, instead using technical ability and a long-game approach. And with the constant and valuable assistance of his father who could be reliably found at every bivouac, he had excellent support. And no doubt Papa Neveu was very useful when it came to an engine swap after the eighth stage.

1979 was the first and last time the Dakar was one by a private entrant. By 1980 Neveu (who would win five Dakars in all) would be factory-supported and he's thanked his good fortune that happened as in his words 'it allowed me to make my passion my job'. But the rally for Neveu has always been more than just a race:

'For me, it is a fantastic life experience. I have not studied extensively, so it is a fantastic school of life. A school of humility because when one is alone in the desert with his motorcycle, one must know how to control the elements, manage oneself or even manage a team also because when one is part of a team, one has 'accounts'. But it was only fun. And when you have the chance to live for thirty years your passion, it's great.'







### THE 1979 YAMAHA XT500

In the early 1970s there were no rally bikes, no adventure bikes. The Americans had enduros and desert racers. The Europeans simply had trail bikes. The XT500 accordingly responded to American demand, where dirt biking was booming and riders who'd enjoyed Yamaha's cool reliable two-stroke DT trail bikes were wanting for something bigger. The XT was only Yamaha's second four-stroke.

Shiro Nakamura, leader of the XT engine project remembers: "When the off-road market started booming in the US, bikers remembered the advantages of the good old singles. Soon the sales guys started to request the development of a four-stroke for off-road. Honestly speaking, we engineers were quite reluctant in the beginning, since we knew about the difficulties of these big thumpers. As soon as they had a bit more power they turned out to be unreliable and they were shaking like hell.

"I can confess that developing this first big single was a real nightmare. We tested many different configurations including DOHC and even cylinder head oil cooling, but the XT was supposed to be simple and reliable and eventually we turned away from all these complicated solutions.

"In the end all our technical problems delayed the roll out by more than one year. But we had succeeded, the XT was now more reliable than a big single four-stroke had ever been! Although it was over-square with a bore and stroke of 87 x 84mm, (all British bikes were long stroke), we obtained the real character of a big thumper. The two-valve head gave a flat torque curve while the smaller flywheel allowed the engine to rev up as easily as we wanted. Dry sump and short stroke also allowed for better ground clearance and a more compact engine than former British bikes ever had."

The XT produced 32hp, in a package that weight 149kg (not light!), although it was simple in design. And Yamaha gave it traditional 21/18" wheels while the suspension was of the longer-travel type that was emerging. The competition-biased TT version was a hit in the US while the XT went big in Europe, especially in France, selling a reported 62,000 units there over its five-year lifespan.

The bike was then ideally placed when the rally phenomenon took off. As well, with Yamaha having a well developed motocross range, with components that could cross-over to the XT, it was possible to create a competitive rally with parts straight off the parts shelf.



## NOT THE WINNING BIKE!?

It's a curious thing. Yamaha won the first ever Dakar Rally (then the Paris-Alger-Dakar Rally) with the XT. Only the bike that was feted in the official posters of the day was not the winning bike, but the machine that finished eighth (fifth moto home), as ridden by French multi-champion trials rider Christian Thayer.

Perhaps the French Yamaha importer, Sonauto, who'd entered a high-profile

team in the race with full expectation of victory, couldn't bring themselves to publicise the success of what was a privateer, dealer-backed entry (Neveu) – especially given the green/white paint on that bike said Kawasaki more than it said Yamaha. Perhaps it was that Thayer's bike was the cleanest machine out of the container on return from the rally? Still an odd choice, given a Sonauto rider, Gilles

Comte, placed runner-up. For now we don't have the answers, but for sure the bike that led the poster campaign in 1979 was one bearing Thayer's number – and clearly even then it was cleaned-up post rally, with a different number board and change of shocks – and so it's that bike that our XT enthusiast Mark Smith has replicated here, given it was the bike with the highest profile and best photo documentation...





### RIDING THE SONAUTO YAMAHA XT500 (REPLICA)

This isn't Christian Thayer's Sonauto Yamaha XT500 from the 1979 Dakar. But it's so close to the original even Thayer himself was apparently close to believing it was the real thing. It's been painstakingly researched and built by an XT500 enthusiast based in the UK's Lincolnshire. Mark Smith has restored countless XT's before this, but fancied a bigger challenge. And it was a bigger challenge, for as Smith explained, he had little more than photos and the odd French Dakar-fan website to reference. As a consequence so many of the parts were recreated from scratch, simply scaling from old photos.

Some aspects of the original bike's build he could trace fairly accurately, like the use of the YZ400 forks and rear wheel. Other things, like the unique rear brake arrangement, he

had to work out for himself, probably, Smith says, much like the Sonauto mechanic did back in the day – cut this, weld that. And as these were the early days of rally, the suppliers back then weren't the specialist suppliers you'll encounter today. So that original super-padded Dakar seat, it was made by a French slipper manufacturer (Smith: 'actually my seat isn't the same, the original was leather on top and plastic on the sides, it looked ghastly, so I've used suede on mine!') And some things you simply can't source today, like the rear shocks. Smith thinks the Dakar bikes ran 400mm units (Konis in later years), but he can't find similar today, so the 360mm units he has are the nearest he could find.

It is though a triumph. The attention to detail means, save for those shocks, everything is ultra-close to the original, right down to the handmade racks to support the tool bags on the back mudguard (a period Preston Petty, of

course). It really is a time warp experience.

The simplicity of the XT, the robustness, puts you more in mind of a WWII bomber than a modern day rally racer. It speaks of the end of the analogue era. And yet the XT feels surprisingly muscular. It felt like that back in 1976, too. Some 32hp was pretty lusty for a 500cc single back then. But I'm surprised it still feels so punchy today, when we're used to seeing nearly 60hp from a 500. The XT should feel 'pony', but it doesn't.

You can attribute that to the fact that the 32hp is at least well-concentrated, for that power all comes in the first 6000rpm, or thereabouts. Modern 500s will rev to around 9000rpm, and more, to unleash their full potential, so there's a sense of the power curve being stretched out. With the XT it comes in early and with meaning. Okay, it's not quite arm stretching, but certainly enough to make your butt sink back into the soft foam of the

luxuriant saddle as you wind on the throttle – and with a slight tug on the handlebars that makes for easy, almost slow-motion, wheelies.

And while 32hp doesn't sound much, there's a feeling that this much does at least exceed the capability of the chassis, for ridden off-road that comparatively basic spec suspension soon feels to be both bottoming and topping out – suspension tech still had a long road (track) ahead back in 1979.

Yet the XT is hugely enjoyable. It needs a kick to start, by the way. There are tales of legend about kick-starting XT's, but with this example it couldn't be easier. Just gently turn the engine over on the kick start until the compression stops the process, then pull in the compression release lever and with a gentle push on the kick start gently push the engine just over top dead centre, then release the lever and give the kick start (from the top of its arc) a firm swing, on zero throttle. The XT fired







first time every time. Maybe those old XTs just needed a good fettle; with a clean set of points and a well setup carb it's no issue. Or maybe we just got lucky.

There's a five-speed gearbox in the XT, which shifts surprisingly sweetly, up and down, and given the low rev excellence you're not fishing for a sixth ratio. This XT had slightly longer gearing, ideal for desert racing, so it would cruise at 50mph with just a gentle throb from the motor.

We just loved the Dakar modifications, they make the XT even more special, and although this is a replica, it's so faithful to the original (these are the correct 400MX forks, it is a TT-spec exhaust, every detail has been meticulously recreated) that the performance feels utterly authentic.

The XT rides high on the Dakar suspension set-up and the special seat adds further to the height, so you ride at a similar height to a modern bike, it's not arse-dragging low. And while us modern day riders struggle to adapt to the seated

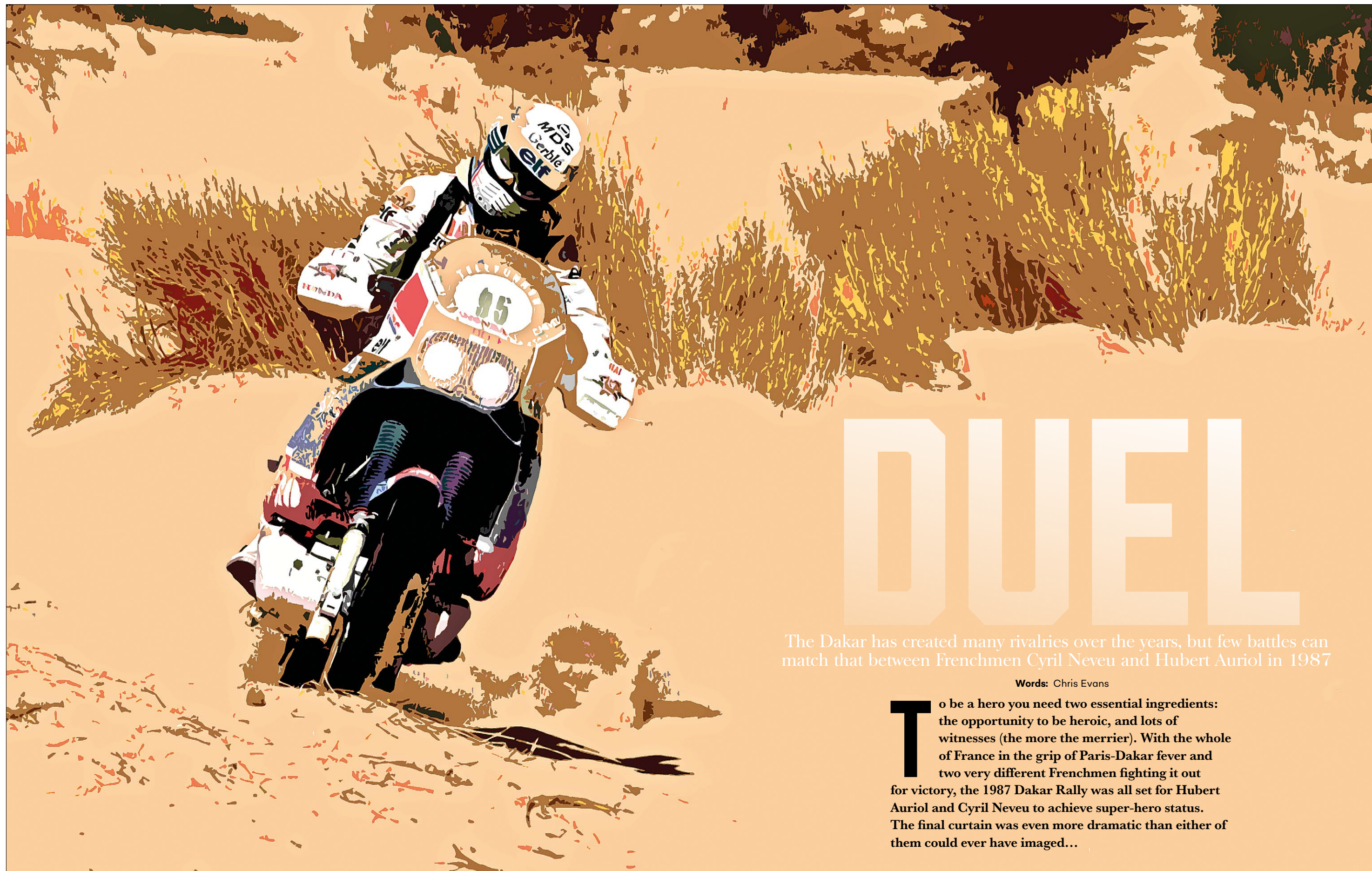
riding position – the generously swept-back handlebars ensure you do stay seated (to stand when riding was clearly considered no more than an emergency procedure back then) – to be seated feels surprisingly natural on the XT. Besides the tank is so wide at the back (let alone at the front!) that standing requires a slightly bow-legged gait. Sitting is the correct modus.

In all it was a privilege to ride this bike, for just a short while to experience a little of what the Sonatuo Yamaha riders, and indeed Cyril Neveu, enjoyed in that first Dakar in 1979. For sure, inside of a decade, desert race bike development would bring sophisticated machines that make the XT look like a kiddy plaything, but that still can't diminish what a superb bike the Dakar XT was, nor its significance. Some 38 of the 90 bike entries in that first Dakar were XT500s. And for a while there the XT was to rally what Yamaha's TZ was to grand prix road racing. Respect is due. 🏍️

IN ALL IT WAS  
A PRIVILEGE TO  
RIDE THIS BIKE,  
TO EXPERIENCE A  
LITTLE OF WHAT  
THE YAMAHA  
RIDERS ENJOYED  
IN THAT FIRST  
DAKAR







# DUEL

The Dakar has created many rivalries over the years, but few battles can match that between Frenchmen Cyril Neveu and Hubert Auriol in 1987

Words: Chris Evans

**T**o be a hero you need two essential ingredients: the opportunity to be heroic, and lots of witnesses (the more the merrier). With the whole of France in the grip of Paris-Dakar fever and two very different Frenchmen fighting it out for victory, the 1987 Dakar Rally was all set for Hubert Auriol and Cyril Neveu to achieve super-hero status. The final curtain was even more dramatic than either of them could ever have imaged...





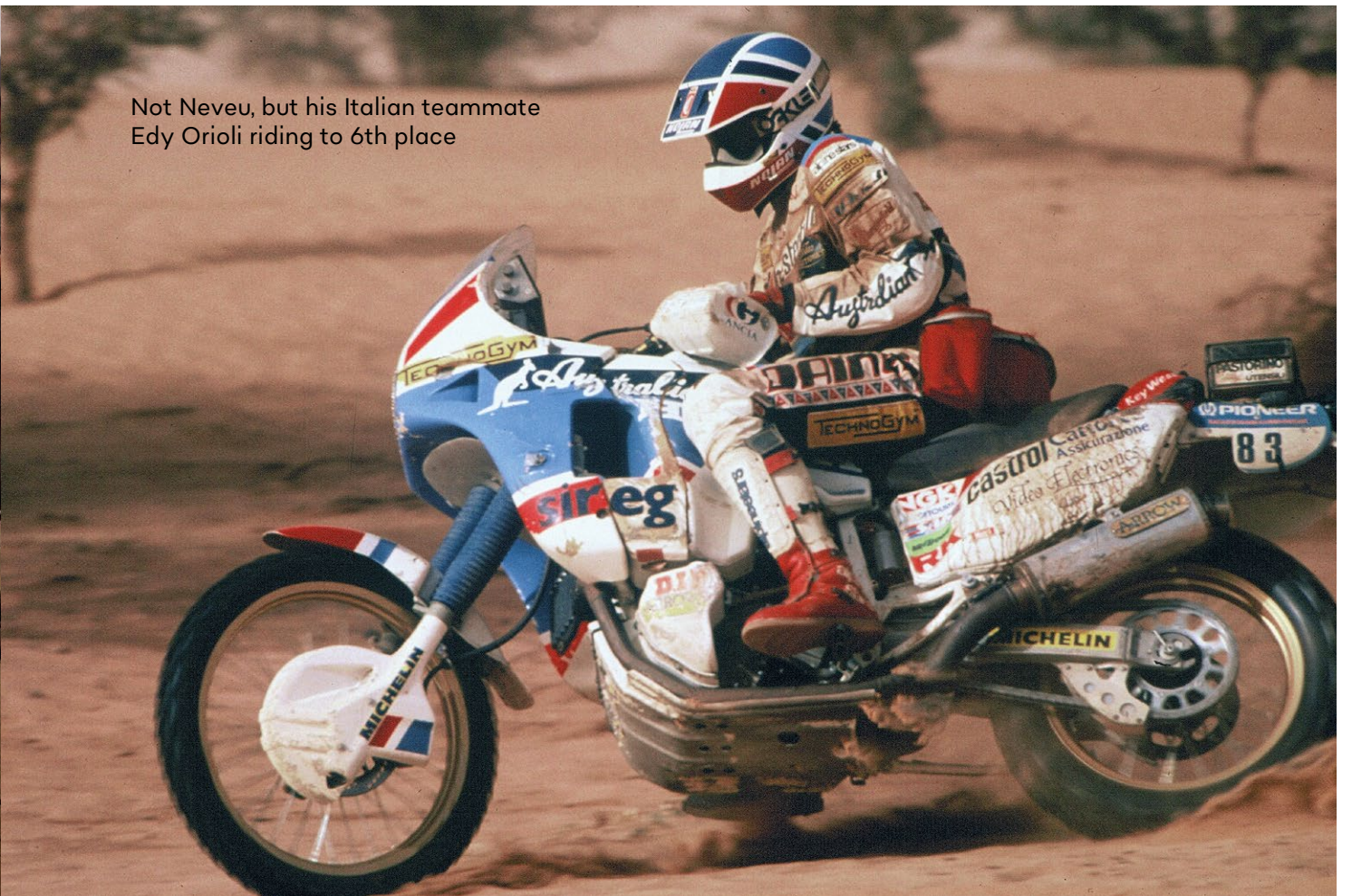
#### SHOULDER PADS AND SUITCASES...

There's no denying that the Dakar gets the sort of media coverage that other off-road events can only dream about. This year it was broadcast in almost 190 countries, with 70 channels putting out a staggering 1200 hours of programme time. While globally the race's popularity increases year on year, paradoxically in France, from where it is organised, it no longer enjoys the almost saturation coverage it attracted in the politically incorrect 1980s. Back then, in the era of big shoulder pads and suitcase sized mobile phones, the Paris Dakar was a media monster. The two big glossy weekly mags Paris Match and VSD were main sponsors, as was the radio station Europe 1 and national TV. Across

the country families who had absolutely no interest in motorsport sat down nightly to watch their heroes battle it out on the pistes of Africa. It was like the Tour de France and Wimbledon all rolled into one.

Its almost instant success had a lot to do with the visionary genius behind it, Thierry Sabine, who was also the brains behind the most spectated off-road event in the world, the Enduro du Touquet. He actually pinched the rally-raid idea off a bloke called Claude Bertrand, who organised a race called the Abidjan-Nice. Sabine signed up to the second Abidjan-Nice at the tender age of 27 and while lost in the Sahara for three days vowed that if he survived he would organise something even more insane. The Paris-Dakar was born.





Not Neveu, but his Italian teammate Edy Orioli riding to 6th place

### AN IRRESPONSIBLE DREAMER

A charismatic chap, who some considered an irresponsible dreamer, Sabine captured the French public's imagination by sending his competitors across the desert with precious little in the way of logistical support. Incredibly, participants had to sort out their own catering arrangements, if your vehicle broke down it stayed where it was and with no distress beacons getting lost was best avoided. To even consider entering the race you had to be a little insane and to win it you had to have levels of determination that few mortals possess. Being fast on a motorcycle was not necessarily a prerequisite for success. Having nerves of steel and highly developed sense of orientation were most certainly were. Step forward our two heroes

du jour, Monsieur Auriol and Monsieur Neveu.

Prior to entering the Dakar both were competing in motorcycle sport but neither were massively successful. But as it turned out, both had what it took to nurse a slow and ill-handling motorcycle, loaded down with fuel and spares across a very large desert. What makes theirs such a great story is that it's about all they had in common. Hubert Auriol was tall, good looking, educated and born into the upper echelons of French society. Rumour had it that he was related to another illustrious Frenchman, a certain General Charles De Gaulle. Raised in Ethiopia and a fluent English speaker, he was nicknamed Le Bel Hubert and had an easy charm that women and sponsors loved. Cyril

Neveu had none of Auriol's social graces. Small, aggressive and from humble origins he was legendary for torturing the French language and spoke absolutely no English at all.

### THE RUNT OF THE LITTER

That didn't stop the runt of the litter winning the very first Dakar in 1979, aboard a privately entered Yamaha XT500. Auriol, also XT500 mounted, finished 12th overall and 7th motorcycle home – in those days there was no separate classifications for bike and cars. Convinced he'd have a better chance of winning on something more powerful, Auriol was back in 1980 aboard a BMW flat twin but was disqualified for some ungentlemanly cheating, leaving his nemesis Neveu to win

again on his XT.

Auriol got his revenge in 1981, getting his big Beemer across the line in first place, while Neveu, having switched to Honda, could only manage 25th place on his XLS500. Neveu was back to his winning ways in '82, while Auriol, along with all the other, by now factory, BMs went out with gearbox problems. 1983 saw Hubert win his second Dakar, while in '84 he finished second to someone who made Neveu look tall – the diminutive Belgian, Gaston Rahier. For 1985 Auriol followed the money with a switch to Cagiva/Ducati for a rumoured US\$1million! Italian reliability problems meant that he was unable to supplement his basic salary with any win bonus for the next



1986 had brought Neveu a win while Auriol crashed out.



couple of years, allowing Neveu to take victory in '86 on the now legendary Honda NXR twin.

But what made the headlines in 86 wasn't Cyril's win but the death of organiser Sabine in an early evening helicopter accident, while out looking for lost competitors. With his smoke flares and white jump suit, Sabine enjoyed rock star status in his country of birth and even today people can still tell you exactly what they were doing when they heard of his death. Human nature and the media being what they are, the 1987 edition,

run by Sabine's dad Gilbert, was even more eagerly awaited and more closely followed in France than previous editions. Neveu was again on HRC's massively accomplished V-twin, while Ducati had finally got their act together and given Auriol a bike he could win with. The stage was set for the mother of all battles.

#### THE MOTHER OF ALL BATTLES

Throughout much of the rally the two men swapped places at the top of the leaderboard and with the rally running for 21 days at that time, the psychological

Happier times for Auriol in 1984, placing runner-up to Gaston Rahier for a BMW 1-2 (Neveu finished 4th)





pressure the two men had to withstand was almost unbearable. But following a series of navigation errors by Neveu, as they approached Lac Rose, on the second to last stage, Auriol started the day with an almost comfortable 12 minute lead. As determined as ever, never-say-die Neveu attacked the stage relentlessly and crossing the finish line first, kept one eye on the stopwatch and the other on the horizon, in the slim hope of having reduced the lead enough to be able to take the win on the next day's, last short stage.

As other riders arrived at the finish Neveu and the media scavenged for news of Auriol and it soon became apparent that he had run into difficulties, with one rider claiming to have stopped to help him get back on his bike after a crash. Finally, Auriol rode into view and a by now almost beside himself Neveu, realising that he was still three minutes down, began to accept defeat.

Until that is, with cameras rolling, Auriol cried out, 'I've the two ankles.... I've the two ankles broken'. The doctors present at the scene cut off his boots and indeed they were, one with an open fracture! Tears streaming down his dirt streaked face and rolling around in agony on the ground, Auriol cried out, 'Cyril is too strong,' and promptly announced his retirement from bike racing!

If there has ever been a more dramatic end to a rally I'm not aware of it and watching the YouTube footage on the net 29 years later, the scene has lost none of its impact. Best of enemies, they went on to write a bestseller of their battle entitled 'Une histoire d'hommes'. True to his word Auriol never raced a bike again but became the first man to win the Dakar on both a bike and in a car. Neveu's 1987 victory would be his last. Both eventually switched to organising rallies with considerable success. Auriol would run the Dakar for nine years on behalf of ASO while Neveu would take over the ailing Rallye Tunisie and turn it into a very profitable enterprise. 📺

## AURIOL/NEVEU – MY PART IN THEIR DOWNFALL...

**They say you should never meet your heroes, but not only did I meet them, I ended up working for both of them. In 1998 I was 'opener' for the parallel Raid Tunisie on a Suzuki DR350 and when Neveu realised I was English promptly announced that he had more important things for me to do than 'mess around on motorcycles'. For the next ten years I worked for him as UK correspondent and competitor relations officer, as well as translator for his infamous briefings.**

I remember one bilingual French competitor saying to me, 'I don't know how you do it. You manage to translate into English what we don't understand in French!' Fortunately I had notes... Not long after starting to work for the Neveu Pelletier Organisation I was poached by Auriol to fulfil the same role on the Dakar. Their old rivalry meant that neither liked me working for the other and the Dakar job should have gone to only other Englishman who spoke French and knew anything about motorcycles – another former TBM contributor by the name of Paul Blezard.

Fortunately for me, Blez's lifelong struggle with punctuality failed to impress Auriol on a 'try out' on the Rallye Maroc and the job was mine. I eventually got shunted out of the briefing translator's job, as in parallel I was working for a rider and some of his rivals were convinced I was getting access to privileged information. In point of fact ASO were scrupulous in making sure I only got any briefing notes just before the start – something that made the job considerably more complex...

To work for, both men were much like their race personas. Cyril Neveu had a fiery temperament and regularly clashed with both his employees and his competitor-customers, although he did have the good



grace to apologise to me after shouting at me down the radio while I was having a dump in a sand storm in El Borma. But despite his abrasive nature he was a difficult man not to like. He wore his heart on his sleeve and could be kind and funny. Not so long ago I acted as a translator for an Englishman making a documentary about the early years of the Dakar and with the camera rolling asked Neveu his memories of the day Sabine died. Almost instantly he burst into tears. On regaining his composure a little he blubbed, '25 years later and I'm still crying about it...' In the film business they call that the 'money shot'.

Although Neveu's man-management style had its limitations, there's also no getting away from the fact he ran very successful rallies with a fraction of ASO's infrastructure. In sharp contrast, Auriol was the consummate communicator. I remember when the rally came to a grinding halt in Niamey, due to a terrorist threat, he was far from sure that the rally would continue. But watching him on French news that evening in my hotel



room, in the capital of Niger, he gave a perfect display of self-assurance. Another time, on the way to the nightly briefing, he told me to insist on the fact that the competitors stay between the cairns after crossing the frontier between Morocco and Mauritania. When I asked him why, he explained that it was because the route crossed a minefield. I remember saying something like, 'I don't know how to stand the pressure,' to which he replied, 'I don't even want to talk about it'. Strangely, as at ease as he was in front of a large crowd or a TV camera, away from the spotlight he was quite a reserved, almost shy man.

What both of them had in common was their celebrity in France following the famous 'blood boots' incident. I travelled quite a lot with them and, even 15 years after that fateful day towards the end of January '87, they could hardly ever get through an airport or a crowded restaurant without someone, usually a middle aged woman, asking them for their autographs. In France, even to this day, they are both regarded as genuine national heroes.

Chris Evans



# Contacts

**RUST SPORTS LTD**

[www.rustsports.com](http://www.rustsports.com)  
Warwick House  
The Grange  
St. Peter Port  
Guernsey  
GY1 2PY

**Editor:** Jonathan Bentman  
[editor@rustsports.com](mailto:editor@rustsports.com)

**Designer:** Rich Page

**Additional Design & Web Management:** Andy Riley

**Industry & Advertising Liaison:** Alex Waters  
[alex.waters@rustsports.com](mailto:alex.waters@rustsports.com)

**Commercial Manager:** James Linane  
[james.linane@rustsports.com](mailto:james.linane@rustsports.com)

**Managing Director:** Warren Malschinger

**Contributors:** Georgia Wells, Chris Evans

**Thanks:**

Mark (Copper) Smith for allowing us to ride his brilliant Sonauto Yamaha XT500 replica – a fantastic experience. To Chris Evans for his near-lifetime of experience and knowledge of the Dakar. To Georgia Wells for turning in such great copy always ahead of deadline. And to Marcin Kin – of all the Dakar photography we reviewed for this issue his stood out as the most complete, be it composition, technical detail or pure emotion. Brilliant work, we salute you, Sir!

**Copyright:** RUST Sports Ltd.  
All rights reserved.

Reproduction of any part of RUST is prohibited without the express permission of RUST Sports Ltd.

