

Morocco Rally: Audi Sport's dress rehearsal for the Dakar

- **Three Audi RS Q e-tron E2 cars with Mattias Ekström/Emil Bergkvist, Stéphane Peterhansel/Edouard Boulanger and Carlos Sainz/Lucas Cruz**
- **Entire team back in competition mode**
- **Tough conditions expected in southwest Morocco**

Neuburg a. d. Donau, September 23, 2022 – A packed schedule characterizes the second half of the year for Audi Sport: After the start of testing of the Audi RS Q e-tron E2 in Europe in July, the premiere on September 1, a subsequent nine-day endurance test in Morocco, homologation and the assembly of three cars, the first competition is now imminent. At the Morocco Rally from October 1 to 6, all three Audi Sport driver pairings – Mattias Ekström/Emil Bergkvist, Stéphane Peterhansel/Edouard Boulanger and Carlos Sainz/Lucas Cruz – will line up at the start.

“Now, together with Q Motorsport, we at Audi Sport are switching back to race mode after an important development phase,” says Head of Audi Motorsport Rolf Michl. “All team members know only too well that no test can replace a race. Morocco is our dress rehearsal for the new car and, at the same time, for the Dakar Rally.” In the first week of October, the teams cover 1,583 kilometers on six special stages at the Morocco Rally with start and finish in Agadir. The total distance, including the liaison sections, extends to 2,319 kilometers.

“We have a clear goal,” explains Uwe Breuling, Head of Vehicle Operations Audi Sport. “This time it’s not about the individual sporting results but about completing as many kilometers as possible without any setbacks. It’s important to us to thoroughly prepare man and machine for the Dakar Rally.” A special feature this year is the geographical location of the event, which will be held in the southwest of the country for the first time. “My previous rally experience is therefore of little use to me this year,” says Stéphane Peterhansel, who won there in 2004, 2009 and 2010. “Basically, this rally remains the ideal dress rehearsal for the Dakar. Dunes, sandy trails, small mountains with stony ground, but also fast tracks on solid ground are exactly the variety we will encounter next January as well.” The bivouac is closer to the Atlantic Ocean in Morocco, but the stages lead inland. “Since we’re going far south, the temperatures will probably be similar to our recent test,” Peterhansel said.

His co-driver Edouard Boulanger knows he also has a difficult task ahead of him. “There are now so many tourists and tour operators in the region that any trail in the sand is misleading,” says the seasoned pro. “You can’t rely on anything, because even a parallel trail ten meters away can be misleading. So we have to concentrate very hard on navigation, which is much more difficult than last time in Abu Dhabi when we won our first race.”

Carlos Sainz, second in Morocco in 2016, emphasizes the close connection to the Dakar Rally: “In our productive tests we tried to make even better use of the car. We’ll soon see how well we worked. The important thing is that we don’t have to change anything after that for the Dakar Rally. This means we can prepare much more calmly than we did a year ago.” His co-driver Lucas Cruz can hardly wait for race mode: “It simply makes a difference whether you navigate in a test or are under competitive pressure because the clock is ticking. I’m already looking forward to our race.”

Mattias Ekström is also full of anticipation. “I have regularly contested circuit races this year, but in the desert it is now my first rally since the Dakar in January,” says Ekström. “The terrain in Morocco reminds me of the surface in Saudi Arabia, even though we face significantly more stages through the dunes there next January.” His co-driver Emil Bergkvist is expecting a very intense event: “When I was in Morocco last year, the orientation was quite difficult. For example, when we arrive at speed-limited zones and there are no reference points in the landscape, we have to be absolutely precise to avoid penalties. A high level of concentration is required throughout.”

Fans and media can find out how well the three driver squads are handling the Morocco Rally on the brand’s social media channels on a daily basis. In the Inside Dakar show on the evening of each stage, Audi Sport also offers its fans a varied first-hand summary of the action.

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