

Dakar dreams and dramas

The 31st edition of the Dakar Rally is now over and saw 113 riders, 13 quad bikers, 91 car teams and 54 truck teams finish the first ever Latin American version of the famous rally. Victory in the motorcycle category went to Spanish rider Marc Coma, who led from start to finish, while French riders Cyril Despres and David Frétiigné rounded off the other two podium places.



Among the 235 riders who started the gruelling 16-day, 9,500-kilometre rally were six BMW riders from all over the world, hoping as 'privateers' to make it to the finish line of arguably the world's toughest motorcycle race. Several of these riders bravely chose to prepare rally versions of the new BMW G 450 X to race in this first ever Dakar on South American soil.

Portuguese rider Pedro Bianchi Prata was the most successful of all the BMW riders, finishing in a fantastic 30th position after more than two weeks of intense racing. The 34-year-old from Porto had raced in the 2007 Dakar and was determined to be one of the best 450cc riders in 2009, and get his BMW G 450 X across the finish line in Buenos Aires.

"It was a real honour to be the first team to take on the Dakar with the new BMW G 450 X," said Pedro. "This Dakar proved to be a real challenge for many different reasons. The first and most obvious was that our team (Pedro and Luis Ferreira) decided to enter on the new BMW sport enduro, which is



fabulous and has so much potential. However, taking a new bike to the hardest rally in the world after only having one-and-a-half months to prepare it for rally use was a real challenge.

“My main goal was to finish the rally and show the world the great potential of this new machine from BMW Motorrad. The extreme heat conditions that we encountered right from the start meant that many riders dropped out because of problems with tyres and engines, but the BMW G 450 X overcame all these conditions. In general it was a very difficult Dakar, so to finish the rally after so many kilometres of riding in sand, over enormous dunes and on all kinds of terrain during the various stages, is proof that the bike is reliable, strong and very resistant.”



Also making it to the finish line in Buenos Aires was ‘local’ rider Andrès Memi. Andrès is the Chief Instructor at the new BMW Enduro Park in Argentina and took the brave decision to participate in the rally with a G 450 X. The 39-year-old started racing at the age of 14, but this was his first ever Dakar Rally and he finished in a creditable 88th place. Being one of the four ‘local’ riders that made it to the finish, Andrès helped generate significant media coverage for BMW and the new G 450 X.

“I had always wanted to do this race,” said Andrès, “mainly because of the desire to challenge oneself. In addition I am very familiar with some of the routes after having crossed them several times on the off-road excursions that I organise. My goal was to finish, as it’s my first participation and I wanted to ride a bike that I know is competitive in enduro, but unique in the field of this Dakar.”

Two riders that weren’t fortunate enough to make it to the finish line on their G 450 X BMWs in Argentina were Portuguese rookie Luis Ferreira and Frenchman Hugo Payen.

Twenty-one-year-old Ferreira suffered a minor crash that resulted in a hole in his radiator. He wasn’t able to get back to the Bivouac in time to start the next stage and therefore was forced to abandon the rally. Despite a great start to his first Dakar, the young Portuguese rider nevertheless learnt a great deal and was very motivated to be a

part of such an event. His aim remains the same – to keep learning and then be good enough to finish on the podium in 2011 or 2012.

French rider Hugo Payen was also forced to retire from racing in the rally after experiencing a technical problem with his modified G 450 X. Although he was upset – as he felt in good shape and was managing well in conditions that many riders were finding extremely testing – Hugo will be back again in 2010 with a full year's experience on the G 450 X. Interestingly, the 37-year-old from Nantes even wanted to stay out in South America to offer any help to BMW riders, so he followed the remainder of the rally in a car with the BMW Argentinian team, providing assistance when necessary – a true sign of BMW Motorrad solidarity.



Two BMW G 650 Xchallenge riders also travelled to South America to participate in this inaugural Dakar in Argentina and Chile. Sixty-two-year-old Dutchman Pierre Karsmakers had his Dakar dream end on day four, when a stone was flicked up and lodged between the rear swingarm and rear wheel sprocket of his rally bike, destroying the carrier that holds the rear sprocket. As this part normally doesn't wear, Pierre had no spare with him, so his rally came to a frustrating and premature end.

Until that point, Pierre had been doing well, moving up the leaderboard by around 10 to 20 places every day. While waiting for assistance, a thunderstorm started, but luckily for the Dutch veteran, he was picked up by fellow countryman Pascal de Baar, who collected him and his bike, and Pierre was transported to the stage finish on top of the truck's refrigerator!

There was better news for 'honorary' Englishman, Simon Pavey, who also rode a modified G 650 Xchallenge and celebrated his seventh Dakar participation. The hard-riding Australian – who is also a BMW UK off-road riding instructor – crossed the line in 68th place after taking on the deserts and mountains of South America to reach the finishers' podium.

"I was so pleased to get to the finish line," said an elated Pavey. "It was touch and go on some days, but it was all worth it – to arrive in Buenos Aires and cross the finishers' podium. The South American version of the Dakar Rally was different to the African version – the variety of terrain, landscapes, culture, the spectators and even how the bivouac was set up each night.

"I really enjoyed the technical riding during this Rally. The combination of the terrain and my BMW G 650 Xchallenge were definitely the right choice for me for this event. The bike gave me the chance to ride further up the field, to keep out of trouble and achieve a Dakar finish. I was also overwhelmed by the South American people – their love of motorsport is second to none and they made this Dakar a special event for everyone involved."

