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DAKAR 2008: HONOUR TO THE SAHARA

"Proud of its place in the history of motorsports and beyond, the Dakar is mainly an event of its time with men and women of their time, concerned by the problems of their time", claimed Etienne Lavigne, director of the rally on the occasion of the official presentation of the course of the 30th edition of the Dakar. The first competitors of this one-in-a-kind event who took off from the place du Trocadéro in December of 1978, were the pioneers of several generations of ordinary adventurers. In 2008, close to 580 vehicles in the race representing 50 nationalities will take off from Lisbon on the 5th of January heading towards Senegal's capital where the finish line will be crossed on Sunday the 20th of January. The success of the Dakar can also be measured through the huge international recognition.

Faithful to its values, the 2008 Dakar 2008 offers to its entrants a long journey in the Saharan desert that has made the legend of the rally. After leaving Europe where two specials will be competed on Portuguese soil, the race will spend four days in Morocco. Eight stages are then planned in Mauritania before reaching Senegal: *"An ocean of sand"* insists Etienne Lavigne. The concept of the course which honours several *"historical"* stage cities like Guelmine in Morocco, Nouadhibou in Mauritania or Saint-Louis in Senegal, was guided by one objective: density. A total of 9273 km will have to be covered with 5736 of specials, that's 1500 km more than in 2007 and close to 1000 km more than during the 2006 edition.

While the announcement of the stages promises a good deal of sand, the variety of the program should allow different types of competitors to use their strengths in the race for the title. In the car event, Mitsubishi's domination, winners of the last seven editions, will once again be disputed by the ambitious Volkswagen team that has been adding extra pressure on the "reds" since they arrived on the event. The vehicles registered by Schlessler, as well as those of the BMW X-Raid team will try to go from an umpiring status to that of an outsider. On two wheels, the battle between the KTM riders in the Repsol or RedBull colours could be worried by the 450cc bikers who already impressed last year claiming several stage wins. Finally, the truck race should see another fierce fight between Kamaz and Ginaf, for whom pride was seriously shaken by the victory of an Exact-Man truck in 2007.

Patrice Clerc in Paris and the «Ministre of the Presidence » in Lisbon have also announced this morning that the start of the Dakar rally 2009 will again be given from Lisbon.

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