

***2007 FIA Middle East Rally Championship  
Round 3 – Cyprus Troodos Rally (20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2007)***

**MERC – AL ATTIYAH LEADS DAY 1 OF FIA TROODOS RALLY**

The 2007 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) moved to Cyprus today with Day 1 of the Troodos Rally - Round 3 of this year's Championship.

Qatar's Nasser Al Attiyah – the defending FIA Middle East and PWRC Champion – showed winning form here today, taking 3 of the morning's challenging special stages and 3 of the afternoon stages.

Looking to secure a 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive Troodos win, Al Attiyah and co-driver Chris Patterson steered their Subaru Impreza WRX STi to a lunchtime lead of 17.44 seconds over Cypriot driver Andreas Peratikos and co-driver Nicos Panayides in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VI. Current MERC leader Sheikh Khalid Al-Qassimi of the UAE and co-driver Nick Beech in their Subaru Impreza WRX STi held 3<sup>rd</sup> at the midway point of the day, 32.6 seconds behind Al Attiyah.

Rally fans had been expecting an exciting battle this weekend, particularly between Al-Qassimi and Al-Attiyah, and the event is shaping up to be a crucial round of the 2007 Middle East Championship. Al Attiyah currently sits 4<sup>th</sup> on the leaderboard, 8 points behind Al-Qassimi.

Speaking at the Service Park mid-way through the day's action, Al Attiyah and Patterson were both upbeat about their progress thus far, although they admitted to being slowed by rear differential problems and incorrect suspension set-up – which they sought to correct in service.

Al Qassimi also admitted to set-up problems and hoped to be in a position to push harder in the afternoon after making adjustments at lunchtime service.

Cypriot driver Andreas Peratikos showed confident form in the morning, setting the fastest time in SS2 and was obviously enjoying the day's drive. Similarly, fan-favourite Andreas Tsouloftas made sure-footed progress through the day in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX.

The afternoon saw Al Attiyah take stages 5 and 6, with Al Qassimi 2<sup>nd</sup> in SS5 but dropping to 11<sup>th</sup> fastest in SS6, unhappy with the rear suspension of his Subaru. Peratikos was 4<sup>th</sup> fastest in SS5, behind Tsouloftas, and a comfortable 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest in SS6 ahead of Tsouloftas. SS7 saw a comeback from Al Qassimi who took 7 seconds off rally leader Al Attiyah, who finished SS7 third fastest behind Peratikos. Al Attiyah fought back in SS8, setting the fastest time ahead of Al Qassimi, with Peratikos chasing.

Suspension and transmission problems plagued Al Attiyah throughout the afternoon and he ended Saturday determined to push hard in the first 4 stages of Day 2 to try and build a

bigger lead, well aware, as he says, that “anything can happen on this rally!” Al Qassimi also struggled through the afternoon with suspected rear suspension problems, while Peratikos and co-driver Nicos Panayides were obviously happy to be ending the day in 2<sup>nd</sup> place. Said Panayides: “It has been a very good day and we’re very pleased. We’ll be looking for a comfortable 2<sup>nd</sup> place tomorrow rather than a risky 1<sup>st</sup>!”

Al Attiyah ends Day 1 just 34.64 seconds ahead of Peratikos in 2<sup>nd</sup>. Al Qassimi sits 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2 minutes and 22.8 seconds from the leader, while Tsouloftas – who ended Day 1 complaining of an upset stomach – is in 4<sup>th</sup>, 2 minutes 25.4 seconds behind Al Attiyah.

26 local and international crews are competing this year’s event, including entrants from Qatar, the UAE, Jordan, the UK and of course Cyprus, all battling for victory in the April sunshine. Day 1 saw drivers tackle a series of technically challenging and tough stages to the west of the capital, Nicosia, into the Troodos mountains.

The Troodos Rally has a reputation for being tough on drivers and cars, and most drivers admitted that this year’s event was no walk in the park – but many also commented that it wasn’t as rough as some past events. This was reflected in the upbeat atmosphere at the Service Park throughout the day, with drivers obviously enjoying the sunshine and camaraderie. Chris Patterson neatly summed up the feel of the day when asked how the day was going: “It’s good. It’s typical of Cyprus in that the stages are hard – but we like it hard!”

Organised by the Cyprus Automobile Association (CAA) and sponsored by the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, Chevrolet and Valvoline, the 2007 Troodos Rally runs over two days with competing crews covering a total of 790.8km, including 240.1km of Special Stage action. The Service Park is once again based at Nicosia’s International State Fair, while the Press Office is at the Hilton Park Nicosia.

Day 1 was relatively free of major retirements, although the morning saw the Subaru Impreza WRX STi of Qatar’s Misfer Almari out with a blown head gasket, as well as Cypriot driver Kikis Koutsakos abandoning SS2 in his Subaru Impreza. Local driver ‘Kyris’ also exited on Day 1, due to power steering failure, with plans to restart tomorrow morning through SupeRally.

Sunday’s action starts with the first car leaving Parc Ferme in Nicosia at 07:00. SS9 (Doryforikos - Delikipos) starts at 07:58, followed by SS10 (Vavatsinia – Mandra Kampiou) at 08:36, SS11 (Agios Onoufrios – Agios Vavatsinias) at 09:14, and SS12 (Kofinou - Stavrovouni) at 10:14.

The first car enters service back in Nicosia at 11:14. The afternoon’s action kicks off with SS13 (Doryforikos - Delikipos) at 12:22, SS14 (Vavatsinia – Mandra Kampiou) at 13:00, SS15 (Agios Onoufrios – Agios Vavatsinias) at 13:38, and SS16 (Kofinou - Stavrovouni) at 14:38.

The rally finishes at 16:10 tomorrow afternoon with the Ceremonial Finish and prize-giving taking place at Nicosia's Eleftheria Square.

### **2007 FIA Troodos Rally Day 1 Results**

1. Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah (QA)	2:03:46.90
2. Andreas Peratikos (CY)	2:04:21.54
3. Sheikh Khalid Al-Qassimi (UAE)	2:06:09.70
4. Andreas Tsouloftas (CY)	2:06:12.30
5. Lambros Limniotis (CY)	2:07:57.07
6. Michele Saleh (RL)	2:09:59.34
7. Charalambos Timotheou (CY)	2:10:01.22
8. Savvas Savva (CY)	2:10:13.00
9. Nick Georgiou (RL)	2:11:05.70
10. A. Al Kuwari (QA)	2:11:21.00

### **2007 FIA MERC Drivers Championship ahead of Troodos Rally:**

1. Sheikh Khalid Al-Qassimi (UAE)	18 pts
2. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Qassimi (UAE)	14 pts
3. Amjad Farrah (HKJ)	11 pts
4. Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah (QA)	10 pts
5. Michel Saleh (RL)	5 pts
6. Khalifa Saleh Al-Attiyah (QA)	4 pts

Troodos Rally Press Office  
21<sup>st</sup> April 2007.

ENDS