

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

FIA MERC TROODOS RALLY VICTORY FOR NASSER AL ATTIYAH

MERC leader Sheikh Khalid Al Qassimi finishes 6th; Cypriot Peratikos finishes comfortable 2nd

The Troodos Rally, round 3 of the 2007 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC), came to an exciting climax in Cyprus today with a clear victory for Qatar's Nasser Al Attiyah – the defending FIA Middle East and PWRC Champion – and co-driver Chris Patterson.

Al Attiyah showed winning form from the start in his Subaru Impreza WRX STi. He took 6 of the 8 special stages on Day 1 and 7 of the 8 stages on Day 2 to score a record 5th consecutive Troodos Rally victory and claw back much-needed points in this year's Middle East Championship race.

Speaking after the event, Al Attiyah said "I'm very happy with the result because this has been a very difficult event for us. We have been battling transmission problems all weekend. But I leave here with 10 points, which tightens the Championship ahead of Jordan – hopefully we can continue to do well there. This is my 5th Troodos Rally victory in a row so Cyprus means great memories for me. Hopefully I will be as successful in the Cyprus Rally in October!"

Current Middle East Championship leader Sheikh Khalid Al Qassimi of the UAE and co-driver Nick Beech battled transmission problems all weekend in their Subaru Impreza WRX STi, and while they would have welcomed a win here this weekend, leave with 5 points – retaining their Championship lead with 23 points.

Speaking after the event, Al Qassimi said: "I pushed really hard today, but the problem is when you push really hard, you risk other problems and we ended up with damage to our radiator which cost us time. I was starting to think we wouldn't even make it to the end. But we got here, so we leave with points and take our Championship lead to Jordan."

Peratikos and co-driver Nicos Panayides were obviously pleased with their 2nd place finish having driven a confident event. Peratikos said: "We are very happy with this weekend, especially as we are driving an older car."

Rally fans had been expecting an exciting battle this weekend, particularly between Al-Qassimi and Al-Attiyah, and the results this weekend look likely to be crucial for the 2007 Middle East Championship. After entering the Rally 8 points behind Al-Qassimi, Al Attiyah's victory boosts his total to a healthy 20 points.

Day 1 saw drivers tackle a series of technically challenging and tough stages to the west of the Cyprus capital, Nicosia, into the Troodos mountains. Suspension and transmission

problems plagued Al Attiyah throughout Saturday and he ended the day determined to push hard in the first 4 stages of Day 2 to try and build a bigger lead, well aware, as he said, that “anything can happen on this rally!” Al Qassimi also struggled through Day 1 with suspected transmission problems,

After an early start, Sunday’s action saw the drivers compete amidst some of the island’s most attractive countryside before returning to Nicosia service at lunchtime and then heading out for a repeat of the morning’s stages in the afternoon.

Al Attiyah started Day 2 34.64 seconds ahead of the Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VI of Andreas Peratikos. Al Qassimi entered Day 2 in 3rd place, 2 minutes and 22.8 seconds from the leader. Fan-favourite Andreas Tsouloftas made sure-footed progress through Saturday in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, starting Day 2 in 4th, 2 minutes 25.4 seconds behind the lead.

Day 2 saw the action move south of Nicosia towards the coast. Al Attiyah started Sunday hoping to pick up the pace in the early stages, with Al Qassimi also starting the day determined to set fast times. While Peratikos had said he would be more than happy with 2nd place, he continued pushing hard. Al Attiyah set the fastest time on SS9 – the first special stage of the day – but Peratikos set an outstanding fastest time on SS10, a whole 23.78 seconds ahead of Al Attiyah! Al Attiyah picked up the pace again, securing his victory in emphatic style by taking a string of stages – setting fastest times in every stage from SS11 to SS16.

With Peratikos consolidating his 2nd place with consistently fast times throughout the day, a battle for 3rd place was shaping up between Al Qassimi and Tsouloftas, before Tsouloftas exited the event with a dramatic roll in SS14. A battle for 3rd then looked likely between Al Qassimi and the Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII of Cypriot driver Charalambos Timotheou, before Al Qassimi’s transmission problems worsened and the Championship leader started to slip down the leaderboard. With Timotheou ultimately taking 3rd, Jordan’s Amjad Farrah steered his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX into 4th place.

26 local and international crews started this weekend’s event, including entrants from Qatar, the UAE, Jordan, the UK, Lebanon and of course Cyprus, all battling for victory in the April sunshine. Organised by the Cyprus Automobile Association (CAA) and sponsored by the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, Chevrolet and Valvoline, the 2007 Troodos Rally ran over saw competing crews cover a total of 790.8km, including 240.1km of Special Stage action. The Service Park was again based at Nicosia’s International State Fair, with the Rally HQ at the Hilton Park Nicosia.

The Troodos Rally has a reputation for being a challenging event, although general consensus was that this year’s event wasn’t as rough as some in the past. This was reflected in the upbeat atmosphere at the Service Park throughout, with drivers obviously enjoying the warm sunshine and camaraderie.

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' went out in Day 1, due to power steering failure, restarting on Sunday morning through SuperRally.

Day 2 saw local drivers Lakis Parellis exit in the first stage, while Kyris' rally finally ended in SS10, the second stage of the day. British driver Ken Dobson, competing the event in his new Subaru Impreza, went out in SS11, despite claiming in the morning to finally be "taming the beast" (co-driver Brian Spademan was quick to dismiss any suggestion that Dobson was referring to him!) Day 2 also put paid to Abdulaziz Al Kuwari's event, with a suspected intermittent electronics failure stopping his car on a road section. Andreas Tsouloftas crashed out in SS14.

The rally finished at 16:10 today with a Ceremonial Finish and prize-giving in Nicosia later in the evening.

2007 FIA Troodos Rally Day 2 Results

1	N. Al Attiyah / C. Patterson	QA/GB	Subaru Impreza 2007
	04:04:54.51		
2	A. Peratikos / N. Panayides	CY/CY	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VI
	04:07:32.26		
3	C. Timotheou / M. Stylianou	CY/CY	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII
	04:16:14.02		
4	A. Farrah / N. Arena	HKJ/HKJ	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
	04:17:54.7		
5	M. Saleh / A. Ghaziri	RL/RL	Subaru Impreza WRX STi
	04:18:20.14		
6	K. Al Qassimi / N. Beech	UAE/GB	Subaru Impreza WRX STi
	04:20:00.60		
7	N. Nikolaou / G. Georgiou	CY/CY	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
	04:22:18.10		
8	N. Georgiou / J. Matar	RL/RL	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
	04:24:38.50		

2007 FIA MERC Drivers Championship after Troodos Rally:

1.	Sheikh Khalid Al Qassimi (UAE)	23 pts
2.	Nasser Al Attiyah (QA)	20 pts
3.	Amjad Farrah (HKJ)	19 pts
4.	Sheikh Abdullah Al Qassimi (UAE)	14 pts

5. Michel Saleh (RL)

11 pts

Troodos Rally Press Office
22nd April 2007.

ENDS