

FIA Middle Eastern Rally Championship 2008
Round 6 – Troodos Rally – 7-9 November 2008

FINAL COUNTDOWN TO 2008 FIA TROODOS RALLY

World motorsport action returns to Cyprus this weekend with the start of the FIA Troodos Rally, the penultimate round of the 2008 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

With the start of the event just hours away, the organizers are finalizing what promises to be the most exciting Troodos Rally ever. The entry list has already confirmed that the top drivers from across the region will descend on Cyprus this weekend to go head to head in their quest for victory.

For the first time, the event moves to the west coast of Cyprus, where it will be based around the popular town of Geroskipou, near the resort of Pafos. Held from Friday (7th) till Sunday (9th), the 2008 Troodos Rally is round 6 of this year's MERC and the organizers, the Cyprus Automobile Association, anticipate that it will be the most exciting in the event's history.

The event gets underway at 20:30hrs on Friday with a Ceremonial Start at Geroskipou's CTO Tourist Beach.

Saturday will see drivers tackle a total of 296.98km, including 132.52km of special stage action. The start from the Service Park at Geroskipou's prestigious Aliathon Hotel is at 08:00, with the first car entering Special Stage (SS) 1 (Koilinia) at 08:53, SS2 (Cedar Valley – Agia) at 10:26, and SS3 (Stavros) at 10:49. Crews will return to Service at 12:14 and then head out again at 12:34 to tackle the last three stages of the day – SS4 (Koilinia) at 13:27, SS5 (Cedar Valley) at 15.00, and SS6 (Stavros) at 15:23. Service in at the Service Park is at 17:13 with the last car into Parc Ferme at 21:00.

Crews will cover a further 380.45km on Sunday, including 119.92km of Special Stages. Parc Ferme out is at 07:00 with the first car entering the first stage of the day SS7 (Anadiou) at 07:58. The first car enters SS8 (Stavros) at 08:31, SS9 (Foinokli) at 09:24. SS10 (Argaka) starts at 10:17 and crews then return to Service at 11:57. Crews will then head out for the last 4 stages of the event – SS11 (Anadiou) at 13:05, SS12 (Stavros) at 13:38, SS13 (Foinokli) at 14:31, and finally SS14 (Argaka) at 15:24. Cars will return to the Service Park for final service at 16:44.

The Ceremonial Finish will be held at Geroskipou's CTO Tourist Beach at 17:00.

The Troodos Rally has been dominated by Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah in recent years, with the outstanding driver winning the last 5 consecutive events. He will be hoping this run of victories continues this year because if Al-Attiyah and Ulster co-driver Chris Patterson can steer their Subaru Impreza to a top 2 position here this weekend, they will secure the 2008 Middle East Championship title. Winning this event would also see Al-Attiyah enter the record books as the first driver to win 3 FIA Championships in the same year – following his victories in the FIA Cup for Cross Country Baja, and the FIA World Cup for Cross Country Rallies.

But victory won't be easy, as there are plenty of drivers from across the region looking for a podium finish, including Cypriot Nicos Thomas who became the youngest ever winner of a MERC event when he secured the top spot at this year's Cyprus Rally.

Other top drivers from across the region will be competing this weekend's event, including Lebanon's Nick Georgiou (Mitsubishi Evo IX) – who currently sits 2nd on the Championship leaderboard with 25 points, and Misfer Al-Marri of Qatar (Subaru Impreza 2008) – currently 3rd with 22 points. Lebanon's Roger Feghali and Michel Saleh, Saudi Arabia's Yazeed Al-Rajhi, Oman's Nizar Al-Shanfari and Kuwait's Mshari Al-Thafiri will also tackle the island's challenging stages, along with a whole host of Cypriot drivers including Nick Thomas in his Mitsubishi Evo IX, Charalambos Timotheou – the winner of the 2007 Cyprus Rally, Constantinos Tingirides, Andreas Tsouloftas, Savvas Savva, and Stavros Antoniou.

Pirelli's Star Driver competition will also be a vital part of this weekend's event as Nick Georgiou and Nicos Thomas do battle to see who will win coveted 2009 World Rally Championship drives. Georgiou's 2nd place finish at last month's Rally Jordan boosted his advantage over Thomas, so Thomas will be pushing hard to take the fight to the last event of the 2008 MERC in Dubai next month.

The Rally Headquarters will be situated at Geroskipou's Aliathon Hotel, as will the Service Park, giving the public plenty of opportunity to see the competing crews and cars first hand.

Speaking ahead of the event, 2008 Troodos Rally Press Officer Stakis Christodoulou said: "We're all very excited about this weekend. Not only do we have the change in venue – which brings us to the beautiful west coast of the island, we also welcome back the best drivers in the region. Plus we've got the added excitement of the Pirelli Star Driver stand-off between Nick Georgiou and Nicos Thomas. And this is our last major sports event before the WRC returns to Cyprus in March! These are exciting times for motorsport in Cyprus and we're all very proud to be involved."

The main sponsor of the 2008 Troodos Rally is the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, with Cyta, the Geroskipou Municipality, Golden Telecom, Travelscope and Compusource as supporters.

For further information about this year's Troodos Rally, visit www.caa.com.cy or telephone the CAA on 22313233.

For further information about Geroskipou, visit www.geroskipou-municipality.com

2008 FIA Middle East Rally Championship Standings ahead of Troodos Rally

Pos	Drivers	QA	CY	SYR	RL	HKJ	Pts
1	Naser Saleh AL ATTIYAH	10	8	10	0	10	38
2	Nick GEORGIU	0	6	3	8	8	25
3	Misfer AL MARRI	8	5	6	0	3	22
4	Nizar AL SHANFARI	3	4	5	3	6	21
5	Michel SALEH	4	3	0	4	5	16
6	Nicos THOMAS	0	10	4	1	0	15
7	Rojer FEGHALI	0	0	0	10	0	10
	= Abdullah AL QASSIMI	0	0	8	2	0	10
9	Salah BIN EIDAN	5	0	2	0	0	7
10	Khalifa Saleh AL ATTIYAH	6	0	0	0	0	6
	= Yazeed AL RAJHI	0	0	0	6	0	6
12	Suhail MAKTOUM	0	0	0	5	0	5
13	Faris BUSTAMI	0	0	0	0	4	4
14	Mazen TANTASH	0	0	0	0	2	2
	= Ahmad AL QUWARI	2	0	0	0	0	2
16	Faris HIJAZI	1	0	0	0	0	1
	= Meshari AL THAFIRI	0	0	1	0	0	1

- Ends -

**Stakis Christodoulou – 2008 Troodos Rally Press Officer
6 November 2008**