

EMBARGOED UNTIL 20:30hrs ON 07/11/2008

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

2008 FIA TROODOS RALLY UNDERWAY

The penultimate round of the 2008 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) got underway in Geroskipou today with the Ceremonial Start of the 2008 Troodos Rally

Drawing the very best drivers from across Cyprus and the region, this year's Troodos Rally promises to be the most exciting ever. Rally fans from across Cyprus and beyond descended upon Geroskipou, near Paphos, this evening to catch their first glimpse of the crews who will be competing here over the weekend.

Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah has dominated the Troodos Rally in recent years, winning the last 5 consecutive events. He will be hoping his run of success continues. If Al-Attiyah and his Ulster co-driver Chris Patterson can steer their Subaru Impreza to a top-two finish, they will secure the 2008 Middle East Championship title. Plus, victory here would also see Al-Attiyah enter the record books as the first driver ever 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 Al-Attiyah won't find it easy going, as the best drivers in the region are competing in Cyprus this weekend, all eyeing a podium place. Young Cypriot Nicos Thomas will be the driver to watch. Thomas is currently involved in a gripping battle with fellow competitor Nick Georgiou of Lebanon to secure guaranteed World Rally Championship drives next season. The Pirelli Star Driver competition will give WRC drives to either Thomas or Georgiou next year – dependant on which driver finishes highest in the 2008 Middle East standings. Georgiou currently leads, but Thomas' victory at the Cyprus Rally sets him in good stead for the Troodos event. If Thomas is successful, it will take their battle to the last round of this year's Middle East Championship in Dubai. The Mitsubishi Evo IX is the weapon of choice for each driver in this weekend's duel.

A host of top Cypriot drivers are taking part, including Charalambos Timotheou – the winner of the 2007 Cyprus Rally, Constantinos Tingirides, Andreas Tsouloftas, Savvas Savva, and Stavros Antoniou. Local rally fans also welcome the return of 1990 Cyprus Rally winner Dimis Mavropoulos, competing again after a number of years away from the sport.

The best drivers from across the region are also here, including Misfer Al-Marri of Qatar, Lebanon's Roger Feghali and Michel Saleh, Saudi Arabia's Yazeed Al-Rajhi, Oman's Nizar Al-Shanfari and Kuwait's Mshari Al-Thafiri.

The Troodos Rally has moved to the west coast this year, where it is based around the picturesque town of Geroskipou. Round 6 of this year's MERC, the Troodos Rally got

underway at 20:30hrs today with the Ceremonial Start at Geroskipou's CTO Tourist Beach.

Drivers will tackle a total of 296.98km tomorrow (Saturday), 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 Rally Headquarters is situated at Geroskipou's Aliathon Hotel, as is the Service Park, where the public have plenty of opportunity to see the competing crews and cars first hand.

The 2008 Troodos Rally is organized by the Cyprus Automobile Association (CAA). The main sponsor of the event 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	Nasser 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
7 November 2008**