

PRESS OFFICE

2008 FIA TROODOS RALLY

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

NASSER AL-ATTIYAH LEADS 2008 FIA TROODOS RALLY

41 crews start event; Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah takes early lead up to lunchtime service.

The battle for the 2008 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) crown moved to Cyprus today with the start of the 2008 Troodos rally.

Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah has dominated the Troodos Rally in recent years, and got off to a flying start here today in his bid to clinch both his 6th consecutive Troodos win and the 2008 Middle East Championship title.

If Al-Attiyah and his Ulster co-driver Chris Patterson can steer their Subaru Impreza to a top two finish here this weekend, they will secure the 2008 Middle East Championship title. It 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.

Speaking at the Service Park this morning, Al-Attiyah was feeling “fantastic” at the prospect of scoring an FIA first here this weekend. Al-Attiyah started the day upbeat about the stages and from his comments at the start seemed to be planning a cautious approach. But after claiming to be looking to find his pace on the early stages before deciding how hard to push later on, he set an impressive pace from the off.

Al-Attiyah took Special Stage 1 (Koilinia) 2.2 seconds faster than the Mitsubishi Evo IX of Lebanon's Roger Feghali. Cypriot drivers Constantinos Tingirides and Demetris “Lillys” Papasavvas set 3rd and 4th fastest times respectively.

5th fastest through the stage was Cypriot Nicos Thomas, who is in a battle of his own this event with Lebanon's Nick Georgiou for coveted Pirelli Star Driver 2009 WRC slots. Georgiou currently sits 2nd overall on the Championship leaderboard with 25 points; Thomas has 15.

Georgiou might lead in the Championship, but Thomas' fast pace reflects his confidence here - he won the Cyprus Rally earlier this year. Each driver is piloting a Mitsubishi Evo IX. Georgiou could only manage 9th fastest through SS1, behind Qatar's Misfer Al-Mari in 8th and Saudi Arabia's Yazeed Al-Rajhi in 7th.

Al-Attiyah maintained his lead through SS2 (Cedar Valley), with Feghali again 2nd fastest. Charalambos Timotheou picked up the pace to come through the stage 3rd, as did Nicos Thomas (4th). Nick Georgiou was obviously taking no risks – coming through 11th fastest. Al- Mari was 6th fastest through the stage, with Oman's Nizar Al Shanfari 7th.

A spin on SS3 (Stavros) saw Al-Attiyah lose pace, allowing Feghali to set the fastest time. Nicos Thomas was again 4th fastest, behind Tingirides. Nick Georgiou seemed to be struggling to find his pace, again finishing outside the lead 10. Qatar's Misfer Al-Mari was 6th fastest, with Souhail Al Maktoum (UAE) 8th, behind Cypriot Savvas Savva.

At lunchtime service, Al-Attiyah leads the rally. Feghali is in 2nd, 3.5 seconds behind the leader. Tingirides sits 3rd. Nicos Thomas holds 4th – a seemingly comfortable lead over Georgiou who currently sits 11th.

Speaking at Service, Al-Attiyah was confident and despite losing time in SS1 due to a throttle problem and a spin on SS3, was happy with the car. Nicos Thomas was “taking it easy” but was suffering rear diff problems which he hoped to attend to in Service. Nick Georgiou admitted to a “big moment” in SS1 where he almost went off after a jump but otherwise seems to be enjoying himself. Roger Feghali is not so fortunate. Hitting a ditch on SS2 wrenched the wheel from his hand, hurting his wrist. Feghali is now in some pain, which he hopes will not worsen.

Drivers are tackling a total of 296.98km today (Saturday), including 132.52km of special stage action.

Afyer Service the crews head out again at 12:34 to tackle the last three stages of the day – SS4 (Koilia) 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 tomorrow, 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 Troodos Rally has moved to the west coast of Cyprus this year, based in the picturesque town of Geroskipou, near the resort of Pafos. Round 6 of this year's MERC, the Troodos Rally got underway at 20:30hrs last night with a Ceremonial Start at Geroskipou's CTO Tourist Beach. Rally fans from across the region are here on this holiday island to see the crews go head to head on the challenging stages. The Ceremonial Finish will be held at Geroskipou's CTO Tourist Beach at 17:00 tomorrow.

The Rally Headquarters and Service Park are located at Geroskipou's Aliathon Hotel and the event 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
8 November 2008**