

PRESS OFFICE

2008 FIA TROODOS RALLY

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

NASSER AL-ATTIYAH HOLDS OVERNIGHT LEAD IN 2008 FIA TROODOS RALLY

Al-Attiyah eyes Championship title; Lebanon's Feghali out in last stage of Day 1

Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah holds the overnight lead in this year's Troodos Rally – the penultimate round of the 2008 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

Al-Attiyah has dominated the Cyprus event 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 will 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. That said, 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, finishing outside the lead 10. Qatar's Misfer Al-Mari was 6th fastest, with Souhail Al Maktoum (UAE) 8th, behind Cypriot Savvas Savva.

Speaking at lunchtime 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 was far less fortunate through the day. Hitting a ditch on SS2 wrenched the wheel from his hand, hurting his wrist. Feghali's luck wouldn't improve, as his collision with a rock later on in SS6 would prove.

After lunchtime service, the crews headed out again to tackle the last three stages of the day. Roger Feghali came back with a vengeance, setting the fastest time through SS4 (Koilinia), with Charalambos Timotheou 2nd and Al-Attiyah 3rd fastest. Thomas slipped back a little – dropping to 7th fastest, with Georgiou 9th. SS5 (Cedar Valley) saw Al-Attiyah back on his game, taking the stage around 14 seconds faster than Feghali. Timotheou managed 3rd fastest, with Thomas dropping another place to 8th fastest. Georgiou came through 12th.

Feghali's collision on SS6 (Stavros) saw him lose his overall rally lead to Al-Attiyah and the Qatari now looks very likely to clinch the Championship title here tomorrow. Feghali now hopes to restart under Superally. "Lillys" Papisavvas was 2nd fastest through SS6, with Al Shanfari just 4.5 seconds behind in 3rd. Thomas managed 5th fastest – Georgiou 8th.

The overnight leaderboard sees Al-Attiyah with a 3m 18.6s lead over Tingirides in 2nd. Timotheou is 3rd, Thomas 4th, and Al Mari 5th. Georgiou sits 10th.

Round 6 of the 2008 MERC, the Troodos Rally has moved to the west coast of Cyprus this year and is based in the picturesque town of Geroskipou, near the resort of Pafos. 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

- Ends -

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