

***2009 Troodos Rally - Round 5 – 2009 FIA Middle East Rally Championship  
9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> October 2009***

**2009 FIA TROODOS RALLY UNDERWAY**

*Al-Rajhi leads Championship fight to Cyprus; Defending Champion Al-Attiyah eyes 7<sup>th</sup> Troodos win*

Round 5 of this year's FIA Middle East Rally Championship got underway in Cyprus today with the Ceremonial Start of the 2009 Troodos Rally.

Motorsport fans from across the region flocked to the west coast town of Geroskipou to see the drivers take to the start ramp and, with a strong field of the region's best drivers taking part, an exciting weekend's sport is expected.

Saudi Arabia's Yazeed Al-Rajhi currently leads the championship in his Peugeot 207 S2000, with French co-driver Matthieu Baumel, and enters the Cyprus event with hopes of a victory that will further secure his lead. But he will face tough competition. The organizers have already confirmed a strong line-up of 38 of the best drivers from across Cyprus and the region, all of whom will be looking to secure a strong finish come Sunday.

Driving a Subaru Impreza, Qatar's Misfer Al-Marri and Ulster co-driver Chris Patterson sit second on the leaderboard with 21 points – 7 behind Al-Rajhi. But it is Al-Marri's fellow countryman and defending MERC champion Nasser Al-Attiyah that the fans will be focused on. Just one point behind Al-Marri in the Championship, Al-Attiyah has six consecutive Troodos Rally victories under his belt and is certain to be looking for a seventh – especially if he's to keep alive his hopes of retaining his MERC crown. Al-Attiyah is tackling this weekend's event in a Subaru Impreza N15 2009 alongside co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini of Italy.

Other international drivers tackling the challenging Cyprus stages include Qatar's Khalid Al-Suwaidi and Abdulaziz Al-Kuwari, and Lebanon's Nick Georgiou and Roger Feghali.

Eyes are also on the Cypriot drivers, including young Cypriot star Nicos Thomas, whose victory at last year's Cyprus Rally made him the youngest driver to ever win a MERC event. Named a Pirelli Star Driver after his successful season last year, Thomas has also competed a number of World Rally Championship events this season and arrives in Cyprus fresh from Spain's WRC event. On his home ground, in his own Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, Thomas is a genuine contender for victory in Cyprus, as are his fellow countrymen Constantinos Tingirides (who finished 3rd here in 2008), Savvas Savva, Constantinos Tingirides, Paraskevas Paraskeva, and 'Lillys'.

With just two rounds of the MERC to come after the Cyprus event (Jordan and Dubai), this weekend promises to be an intense battle for victory. This year's event includes a mix of classic and new stages to ensure the sort of challenge drivers and fans have come

to expect of a Cyprus event. The summer heat has now passed and the island offers pleasantly warm temperatures, but while the sun may be shining, the threat of autumn showers is never far away – especially in the Troodos mountains where the weekend’s challenging stages are being tackled. And rain on an event as tough as the Troodos Rally can have a dramatic effect.

Speaking at the Service Park today, Troodos Rally Clerk of the Course Nayia Kontopoulou said: “We’re expecting a great weekend’s rallying here. We’ve got a great line-up of drivers and an event that’s going to be pivotal in this year’s Middle East Championship. Will Al-Attiyah continue his winning streak? Will Al-Rajhi extend his lead? Will one of our local drivers take the win? We’re all looking forward to finding out. And it’s great to be back here in Geroskipou – we’ve got a great Service Park and being part of the tourist area gives the event a fun feel. The Troodos Rally always has a great atmosphere and this year it’s better than ever. I encourage everyone to come along and join in the fun.”

After the glitz of tonight’s Ceremonial Start, the rally proper gets underway from the Service Park at Geroskipou’s Riu Cypria Bay hotel at 08:00 tomorrow morning, with the first car entering Special Stage (SS) 1 (Agios Nicolaos) at 08:58, SS2 (Panagia) at 09:46, and SS3 (Xeropigi/Stavros) at 10:14. Crews will return to the Service Park at 11:44 and then head out again at 12:04 to tackle the last three stages of the day – SS4 (Agios Nicolaos) at 13:02, SS5 (Panagia) at 13:50, and SS6 (Xeropigi-Stavros) at 14:18. Flexi Service out and Parc Ferme in at the Service Park is at 16:13, with the last car into Parc Ferme at 19:00. Saturday will see drivers tackle a total of 316.14km, including 111.84km of special stage action.

The 2009 Troodos Rally is organised by the Cyprus Automobile Association (CAA) and supported by the Cyprus Tourism Organisation. The event Headquarters, Press Office and Service Park are located in and around Geroskipou’s Riu Cypria Maris hotel.

*For further information about this year’s Troodos Rally, visit [www.caa.com.cy](http://www.caa.com.cy) or telephone the CAA on (00357) 22313233. For further information about Geroskipou, visit [www.geroskipou-municipality.com](http://www.geroskipou-municipality.com)*

### **2009 FIA MERC Drivers Standings Ahead Of 2009 Troodos Rally**

Pos	Drivers	QA	KWT	YR	RL	Pts
1	Yazeed AL RAJHI (SA)	8	0	10	10	28
2	Misfer AL MARRI (QA)	5	8	8	0	21
3	Nasser AL ATTIYA (QA)	10	10	0	0	20
4	Mubarak AL HAJRI (QA)	1	0	6	6	13
	= Nick GEORGIU (RL)	0	0	5	8	13
6	Khaled AL QASSIMI (UAE)	6	6	0	0	12
7	Mufeed MUBARAK (KWT)	0	5	2	1	8
	= Michel SALEH (RL)	0	0	4	4	8

	= Khalid AL SUWAIDI (QA)	0	0	3	5	8
10	Abdullah AL QASSIMI (UAE)	2	0	0	3	5
11	Rashid AL KETBI (UAE)	4	0	0	0	4
	= Meshal AL NEJADI (KWT)	0	4	0	0	4
13	Meshari AL THAFIRI (KWT)	0	3	0	0	3
	= Salah BIN EIDAN (KWT)	3	0	0	0	3
15	Jaber AL MARRI (QA)	0	2	0	0	2
	= Ammar HIJAZI (HKJ)	0	0	0	2	2
17	Faisal AL ATTIYA (QA)	0	1	0	0	1
	= Ahmad AL SABBAN (SA)	0	0	1	0	1

ENDS

**2009 Troodos Rally Press Office**  
**9<sup>th</sup> October 2009**