



SAHARA CHALLENGE

Destination Dakar

19 September - 7 October 2027

Portugal - Spain - Morocco - Moroccan Sahara - Mauritania - Senegal



HERO-ERA.COM



Authentic Motoring Adventures Forged By Pioneers



Portugal



Photo: Blue Passion

Spain



Photo: Will Broadhead

Morocco



Photo: Blue Passion

Moroccan Sahara



Photo: Will Broadhead

Mauritania



Photo: Will Broadhead

Senegal



Photo: Will Broadhead

Destination Dakar

***5th Sahara Challenge to take new adventurous 5,250 km route, Lisbon to Dakar**

***Portugal, Spain, and Morocco lead to 'Destination of Rally Legends' – Dakar**

***Massive expanse of Moroccan Sahara Desert will take teams into 'Unknown' territory**

***Sahara Challenge 2027 will be qualifying round for Peking to Paris 2028**

The Sahara Challenge 2027 (Starting 19th September) will be the most adventurous and toughest yet with a 5,250 km journey from Lisbon to Dakar, the 'Destination of Rally Legends' from 1978 to today.

The exciting route will be providing the best possible variety of terrain and competition from Europe to Africa, including forests, mountain passes, flowing gravel tracks and then the desert itself. The competition adventure will soak up the culture of Northern Africa before turning west and into unknown territory of vast emptiness, and desolation.

The black-coded 'super endurance' rally will turn south along the coast, periodically veering off into the unknown territory of vast dunes for exciting but demanding Sporting Trial Competition Sections as befitting the 'Destination of Rally Legends' - Dakar.

The Sahara Challenge 2027 will double as a shake down or qualifying event for the 2028 Peking to Paris Motor Challenge, and it is being designed by a P2P and African desert expert, overseen by the seasoned organisation of HERO-ERA. Multi-Middle East Rally Navigator's Champion and desert event specialist John Spiller, has created a super endurance rally worthy of the title 'Challenge.'

21 days and 5,250 kms of genuine adventure, competition and cultural experiences will begin in Lisbon, taking in European competition before a ferry crossing from Tarifa to Tangiers in Morocco, North Africa. This established super endurance adventure will travel South through the Riff mountains, the Middle and High Atlas ranges and the desert landscapes.

Leaving Tangiers for the Rabat foothills of the Riff Mountains and the sinuous roads that climb and descend the remote hills, the rally will pass through the "Blue City" (Chefchaouen). The route then heads toward the capital city, Rabat, on the Atlantic Coast over more mountain roads.



Photo: Will Broadhead

From Rabat to Fes, the terrain will lead to some entertaining competitive sections and the Roman temple of Volubilis. Then there is a tricky tarmac climb and flowing gravel tracks to Fes and the kasbah, where the narrow market streets of the old city heave with atmosphere.

Fes to Michlefin will be across open countryside then the lake and forests of the Tazekka National Park with some great driving roads through the hills. A real mixture of experiences will follow as the terrain gradually opens up to desert - a hint of what is to follow.

The heady mix continues to surprise and contrast as a night at Michlefin will provide an Alpine experience of a very upmarket winter ski resort.

The route to Erfoud will be the 'The day that the desert opens to us,' said John Spiller, as the change in terrain and culture will reveal the 'real Morocco'. Wadis flanked with mountains over winding roads with little or no traffic, to eventually arrive at Erfoud, close to the Algerian border, touching on the ergs and dunes of the Sahara. Erfoud is the desert centre where all the Dakar competitors train and test, and the hotel with its traditional architecture, is a real chill spot.



Photo: Will Broadhead

A desert loop back to Erfoud promises a day of mainly off-road driving with a good mix of competition, including a number of Sporting Trial Sections which will test the Navigators as much as the cars and drivers.

High into the Atlas Mountains to Bin El Ouidane, crews will climb the scenic gorge of the Ziz river and then onto the shores of Lac Tislit, the highest in Morocco. A great section across the Atlas descends to Barrage Bin El Ouidane, a shoreline hotel with great views.

Marrakech is the next heading for a well-deserved 'non-driving' rest day, the route follows a varied path with excursions into the Atlas and generally entertaining driving before arriving at the exotic and historic Marrakech.

The route to Essaouira begins with a Sporting Trial Section in the desert before climbing into the mountains for some great driving, then descending again to the plain. There is a delightful drive all the way to the Atlantic coast with a number of competitive sections before reaching the shoreline for a final test into Essaouira, the 'Windy City,' an ancient port with a Souk that is actually quieter than the one in Marrakech!

Essaouira leads to Agadir through a variety of roads and terrain to arrive at the coastal city. From Agadir to Tan Tan, the route leads to the southern extremes of the country and starts with some mountain ascents and descents before the terrain levels out and the rally starts to tackle its final six-day sting, the Moroccan Sahara, and take off for 'Destination Dakar.'

The foreboding shape and consistency of huge sand dunes await competitors as the rally will deviate at times into the unknown and the emptiness of a vast sea of sand. With no hotel or Oasis in sight, there is a high probability that rally will take food and shelter in their bivouacs for two nights, to make the 'Dakar Experience' complete!

This hard-edged super endurance rally will still be soft under the tyre tread as the southerly route will take more deviations with competition into the sands of Mauritania before heading into Senegal as 'Destination Dakar' and relief beckon. To reach Dakar will be an achievement to be proud of, the destination of so many Dakar Champions in the past, including Mr Dakar himself, Stéphane Peterhansel. The Frenchman holds the record for the most wins in the Dakar Rally with a total of 14 victories. He won six times in the motorcycle category (1991–93, 1995, and 1997–98) and eight times in the car category (2004–05, 2007, 2012–13, 2016–17, and 2021).



The Chairman of HERO-ERA, Tomas de Vargas Machuca, commented on the new and adventurous Lisbon to Dakar route of the 2027 Sahara Challenge:

"The Sahara Challenge represents one of our legacy adventure rallies, which has historically started in Spain, crossed Morocco and finished back in Spain. But like all our events, we need to innovate, change, improve, and listen to feedback. We have listened, including taking in feedback from the 4th and last Sahara Challenge in the same format, which was great, but change was needed.

"Therefore, we spoke to our friends in the rally world and looked at all availabilities from a geopolitical perspective as well as restrictions of certain areas. We were very much relieved to find that the route to Dakar is now passable again after many years of tensions between different nations. So, we are seizing the opportunity to take our competitors on this challenging desert rally. They will not only see great parts of Portugal and Spain and across Morocco, but now will experience the Moroccan Sahara, then Mauritania and Senegal, amongst the most iconic countries visited by the Dakar Rally.

"Our rallies take people to countries that now open up or can welcome us again as others unfortunately shut. So, it's important to demonstrate that flexibility, that knowledge, to be able to enjoy different experiences. This is important to take people to places that they would otherwise not go on their own."

Route Designer and the architect of Sahara Challenge 2027, John Spiller added his views:

“This Lisbon-Dakar evolution of the Sahara Challenge really opens the concept up. Yes, we are very familiar with Morocco but when the Dakar element is incorporated, the event rises to another level and the reference to Africa becomes credible. The event will link classic European rallying with the fun and variety of Morocco before progressing to 'Phase III', a true taste of rallying 'Continental Africa.' Adventure, look out, HERO-ERA is coming at you!”



5,000 KM



Photo: Will Broadhead

19 Days



Photo: Will Broadhead

10°C to 40°C



Photo: Will Broadhead

Provisional Itinerary



Provisional Itinerary

Date	Country	From	To	Km (Approx)
Day -1	Portugal	Lisbon	Lisbon	-
Day 0		Lisbon	Lisbon	-
Day 1	Spain	Lisbon	Sevilla	450
Day 2		Sevilla	Tangiers	200
Day 3	Morocco	Tangiers	Rabat	400
Day 4		Rabat	Fes	200
Day 5		Fes	Ifrane	200
Day 6		Ifrane	Erfoud	450
Day 7		Erfoud	Erfoud	250
Day 8		Erfoud	Bin El Ouidane	400
Day 9		Bin El Ouidane	Marrakesh	200
Day 10		Marrakesh	Marrakesh	-
Day 11		Marrakesh	Essaouira	250
Day 12		Essaouira	Agadir	300
Day 13		Agadir	Tan Tan	350
Day 14		Tan Tan	Laayoune	300
Day 15	Moroccan Sahara	Laayoune	Dakhla	550
Day 16		Dakhla	Nouadhibou	450
Day 17	Mauritania	Nouadhibou	Nouakchott	500
Day 18		Nouakchott	St. Louis	250
Day 19	Senegal	St. Louis	Dakar	250

Estimated Total 5,000 KM



The Route

Portugal & Spain

Starting from Lisbon, close to the Estoril area, the first day will take crews onto some great driving roads, ending up in the Cadiz area overnight. In the morning, most of the day will be spent travelling to the port of Tarifa for the ferry across into Tangier. It's two days, but it will be valuable time to settle cars and crews in, the transport section will be used to help prepare competitors for the challenge ahead. There will be some early competition along the route in the form regularities, mainly to shake off any rust and tune teams in to be ready for Morocco.

Morocco

Disembarking from the short ferry crossing from Tarifa to Tangiers, there is a distinct change in the culture as we arrive in Africa. A night in Tangiers resets the mind for what is to come; ten days south through the Riff mountains, the Middle and the High Atlas ranges and the desert scapes that stretch to the horizon. The mix of influences, Spanish, French and Berbour add to the flavour as we head deeper into this beautiful country.

Tangiers to Rabat. In no time, the route enters the foothills of re Riff mountains and the sinuous roads that climb and descend the remote hills covered in cork forests passing through the “Blue City” (Chefchaouen) followed by the best Tagine in Morocco at the Dardara restaurant, now a Sahara tradition. The route then heads south west toward the capital city, Rabat on the Atlantic coast over more mountain roads which gradually level off to more bucolic settings as Rabat is approached.

Rabat to Fes. The new capital to the ancient capital. The terrain is generally rural as we head East with some entertaining competitive sections and a brief halt at the Roman temple of Volubilis for some cultural intake followed by a tricky tarmac climb and flowing gravel tracks to enter Fes where, energy permitting, the kasbah should not be missed; a labyrinth of narrow streets of the old city which heaves with atmosphere.

Fes to Michlefin. We head East over open countryside toward the lake and forests of the Tazekka



Photo: Will Broadhead

National Park and some great driving roads through the hills. Then we turn West and a real mixture of experiences with the terrain gradually opening up to open desert and a mild hint at what is to follow. The night is spent at Michlefin; a very upmarket ski resort (in Winter) with a very Alpine ambience.

Michlefin to Erfoud. The day that the desert opens to us. There is a distinct change in terrain and culture as the “real Morocco” becomes apparent as we follow Wadis flanked with mountains over winding roads with little, or no traffic passing through the occasional town or village to arrive at Erfoud, close to the Algerian border and touching on the ergs and dunes of the Sahara that we expect. Erfoud is the desert centre where all the Dakar competitors train and test and the hotel, with its traditional architecture, is a real chill spot.



Erfoud to Erfoud. A desert loop which promises a day of mainly off road driving with a good mix of competition which includes a number of Sporting Sections which will test the Navigators as much as the cars and drivers. The tracks skirt the dunes of Merzouga before heading back to our Erfoud hotel for a second night.

Erfoud to Ben El Ouidane. Into the High Atlas , the route climbs the very scenic gorge of the Ziz river and then begins a long, gradual ascent to the town of Imilchil where a picnic lunch will be enjoyed on the shores of Lac Tislit, the highest in Morocco. Then a great section across the Atlas followed by a sharpish descent and along the valley to the shores of the Barrage El Ouidane and the hotel located on the shoreline with great views.

Ben El Ouidane – Marrakech. Heading for Marrakech and a well deserved “non driving (rest)” day, the route follows a re varied path with “excursions” into the Atlas and generally entertaining driving as it approaches the plain, in the middle of which sits the exotic and historic Marrakech.

Marrakech (Rest Day). Enjoy the opportunity for some routine maintenance or chill by the pool buy the evening demands a visit to the Jemma Al Fnaa, the legendary square, thronged with people, entertainers and shops. Take a horse drawn carriage just to complete the experience, but, not too late to bed.

Marrakech to Essaouira. A day of contrasts begins with a Sporting Section in the desert before climbing into the mountains for some great driving leading to a descent and a sinuous exit to the plain. Crossing

the main highway, the road is a delight to drive all the way to the Atlantic coast with a number of competitive sections to spice it up. Then north up the coast before turning down to the shoreline for a final test into the “windy city”, an ancient port with a quieter Souk for any who failed to make it into Marrakech.

Essaouira – Agadir. A day in the country with a variety of roads and terrain lead to the resort, coastal city of Agadir. The route leads through “orchards” of Argan trees (a relative of the olive but interest has recently revived for its hair conditioning properties!). Some good climbs and descents punctuate the day and lead eventually into Agadir.

Agadir to Tan Tan. The route leads to the southern extremes of the country and starts with some mountain ascents and descents before the terrain levels out and we are “off to Dakar”, so to speak.



Moroccan Sahara, Mauritania and Senegal

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Photo: Will Broadhead



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The Sahara Challenge 2027

As wilderness go, the Sahara is a big one. The largest hot desert in the world, stretching the width of Africa, some 9 million square kilometres of rolling dunes and rock plateaus. The environment is stunning in every respect, to be able drive a rally car there is not just a challenge, but a privilege.

The Sahara Challenge will select the very best bits that the desert has to offer and condense it all into a 19-day adventure, that will test the soul and leave an unrivalled feeling of triumph after one has conquered the ever-encroaching sands of the desert.

WHO CAN ENTER ?

Eligible Cars :

There Are Three Main Categories and Two 'Invitation' Classes:

A – Pioneer up to December 1920

B – Vintage & Vintageant from January 1921 up to December 1947

C – Classic from January 1948 to December 1975

D - Pre-1985 4X4 Vehicles by 'Invitation' only some categories may be subdivided into classes based on engine size.

E – Pre-1985 2WD cars production based for 'Invitation' consideration. D and E classes will have separate classes and awards from the main event.



Photo: v11/Breathhead



About HERO-ERA

HERO-ERA is the world's foremost global historic motoring events company, running rallies in short, medium and long-form for classic and vintage cars. Its famed Peking to Paris Motor Challenge of 37 days covering 14,800 kms across the world's largest landmass, follows the wheel tracks and echoes the pioneering spirit of the first competitors in 1907.

Its slogan, Authentic Motoring Adventures - Forged by Pioneers, is meshed into the event calendar offering a broad spectrum of rallies from training and short events which include its own championship, the HERO Challenge, to medium-length rallies such as the RAC Rally of the Tests. Longer events over three days include the Classic Marathon series and Badawi Trial over ten days.

HERO-ERA offers a complete historic motoring platform. There is a fleet of Arrive and Drive rally cars available for hire and all the necessary equipment to go rallying in the HERO Store. Tours and tailored events are run by Itineris, which is part of the group, where they also administer new membership packages to help support the growth of new businesses in the industry.

Also part of the group, Hangar 136 Ltd, offers bespoke car sales whilst another associated company, The Classic Valuer Ltd, helps save the industry time and money with their classic car valuations, including their groundbreaking instant image recognition system.

Since commissioning a full economic study of the historic motoring industry which produced astounding results as to the size and value of the industry (CEBR Economic and Environmental Impact Study of Historic and Classic Motoring Industry in the UK*) HERO-ERA have become a founder member of the Historic Car and Vehicle Alliance (HCVA) to create awareness, lobby and promote sustainable innovation in the business. HERO-ERA are helping to create an ecosystem for classic motoring which preserves, protects and nurtures the business for the future.

As custodians of part of the industry, HERO-ERA prides itself as a leader in sustainable initiatives through their NET-HERO division with a state-of-the-art offset platform. Their Rally for the Ages partnership with Coryton, a leader in advanced biofuels, mean vehicle emissions were meticulously calculated, ensuring transparency and accountability, demonstrating the power of innovation and collective action in the fight against climate change.

HERO-ERA are leading the way in environmentally responsible driving.

HERO-ERA

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