

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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For immediate release

### **Australian riders finish in toughest off-road rally in Africa**

**International off-road racer and Albury resident Andrew Houlihan has finished 21st outright in the gruelling 2020 Africa ECO Race.**

The 14 day off-road rally saw riders struggle at times with the demanding terrain, some stranded in the desert for up to 30 hours, and one stage cut short due to multiple serious crashes requiring evacuations by helicopter.

Whilst the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia has captured plenty of attention in recent weeks, 3 Australians, including Andrew Houlihan, have been tackling an equally demanding event in Northern Africa.

The Africa ECO Race is an annual rally raid that starts in Europe and retraces much of the path of the original Paris-Dakar rally, ending on the banks of the famous pink lake - Lac Rose - in Senegal.

The event came about after the 2008 Paris-Dakar was abruptly cancelled one day before it was due to start amid fears of a terrorist attack in Mauritania, and then relocated to South America.

It was a big blow to rally teams and fans worldwide, and the African Race was created to ensure the original format and character of the Paris-Dakar continued on.

Andrew Houlihan says that *“whilst the Dakar Rally is the best known rally in the world, the Africa ECO Race is often referred to as the REAL race to Dakar as it retraces much of the old Paris-Dakar route and finishes at the original end point in Dakar, Senegal.”*

*“And we travel through some of the toughest terrain in the world on the way.”*

The Africa ECO Race is now a world class off-road rally event, equal in difficulty to the much more heavily promoted Dakar Rally that is now run in Saudi Arabia.

This year's event started under lights in Monaco on the 4th January.

Competitors then travelled to the port of Savona in Italy to board a ferry which took them to Tangier in Morocco.

From there they competed for 12 days racing over a distance of 6,500km through the mind-blowing landscapes of Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania and Senegal.

Each stage was between 300 to 750km, with the average day being a distance of 400 to 500km.

**Andrew Houlihan entered this race with no expectations other than to finish safely.**

He is no stranger to the challenges of off-road racing having won multiple motocross titles in Australia, but at the age of almost 50 he made his international debut in the Hellas Rally in Greece in 2018.

A major crash in that rally almost cost him his life, and after a long recovery he came back in 2019 to compete in four international rallies including the Hispania Rally in Spain (placed 6th in class) and the Rally du Maroc where he came 8th in the Enduro Cup category.

The 2020 Africa ECO Race was the next step on Andrew's journey to his ultimate goal of competing in the 2021 Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia.

It was also the first time he has competed with his new **KTM 450 Factory Rallye bike**. Andrew made the shift to KTM to gain more performance and reliability.

The bike is similar to those used by leading KTM contenders, including fellow Australian Toby Price who has just claimed 3rd place in this year's Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia.

Andrew's previous successes have also helped to gain sponsorship from **Coca-Cola Energy**.

The energy drink division of Coca-Cola, one of the most recognised and valuable brands in the world, has put their support behind Andrew, his teammate Mexican rider **Juan Pablo Guillen** and their **Nomadas Adventure** team.

A field of 74 motorbikes started this year's rally, but the tough conditions took their toll on the riders and machines with only 61 rolling up to the start line for the final day.

And of those, many had dealt with mechanical failure, crashes and injuries that had put them more than 60 hours behind the leaders. Those riders were continuing on in the rally to gain experience for future events.

Stage 8 was particularly hard on riders with many bikes still stranded in the Mauritanian sand dunes overnight. For many of those stranded the rescue mission would take up to 30 hours.

Two days later tough conditions and multiple serious crashes caused the early termination of the 600km 10th stage.

**Andrew's 21st place in the 2020 Africa ECO Race is despite facing his own challenges during the event.**

A fuel pump failure in stage 2 cost him over an hour and a half while he siphoned fuel with his CamelBak from one fuel tank to the operational one.

And for the last 3 days of the race Andrew said his right hand cramped badly and he could hardly hang onto the bike.

Given the challenging nature of the event, even getting to the finish line is a major achievement and a challenge that most people could never contemplate taking on, but Andrew has managed to finish every stage, remain relatively uninjured and then finish just outside the top 20.

Andrew describes his experience well:

*"I had a couple of bad days and a few really good days."*

*"Very little sleep for 12 days and just enough food to keep going each day. We saw the best and the worst of Northern Africa and it was an emotional and physical roller coaster."*

*"Every day at some stage I would ask myself, why am I doing this."*

*"There were some serious accidents, riders stuck in the dunes for 24 hours, bikes and cars breaking down, crazy African desert dwellers to contend with and many new friendships made."*

Andrew's Coca-Cola Energy/Nomadas Adventure teammate, **Pablo Guillen** (KTM), was one of the few riders who gained positions on the final day. He finished the rally in 17th outright and second in the +450cc class.

The larger engine size of Pablo's bike dictated that he ran in a different class to Andrew but still competed the same for outright honours.

**Matt Sutherland** (KTM), who was born in Ballarat but now lives in Vancouver, was a late entry into the rally. He replaced a rider in Lyndon Poskitt's Team Races 2 Places who had to withdraw due to illness. Matt finished the rally in 7th place.

And the third Australian, **Peter Caldwell** (KTM) finished 36th after losing plenty of time in an early stage when he got lost in the sand dunes.

**Andrew's final words at the end of the rally:**

*"I'm happy to finish in 21st position overall despite a couple of really bad days."*

*"It's time to get home to Katie and the kids, add some more titanium pins and screws to my body, recover and get ready for the next race!!!!!"*

Information about the Africa ECO Race and daily reports from the rally are posted at [roadtodakar.com.au](http://roadtodakar.com.au) and [facebook.com/RoadToDakar2021/](https://www.facebook.com/RoadToDakar2021/)

Media releases are posted to [roadtodakar.com.au/media/](http://roadtodakar.com.au/media/)

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