

KUWAIT INTERNATIONAL RALLY KICKS OFF AT SIRBB CIRCUIT



— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Kuwait International Rally and the third stage of the Middle East round two of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship is being held in Kuwait from March 24 - 26, 2016. The exciting three-day event kicked off yesterday at the Sirbb circuit.

The event is hosted by the Basil Salem Al-Sabah Motor Racing Club (BMRC). Many international champions from Kuwait, Qatar, Lebanon, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other countries will be participating in this rally including the Kuwaiti champion Meshari Al-Thafiri, Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah, Saudi Arabian Rakan Al-Rashed, Jassim Al-Muqahwi, and many others.

The event is being held under the chairmanship of Sheikh Athbi Nayef Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in conjunction with the General Authority for Sport. The meat of the action takes place today and Saturday in the desert to the south of Kuwait City.

During the press conference yesterday at the Kuwait Historical, Vintage and Classic Car Museum, FIA Vice President Nasser Khalifa Al-

Attiyah said that the Kuwait Rally is one of the best in the region. "We see Kuwait International Rally improving every year. The participation of world champion Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah is also a great addition to the rally. The participation was affected by the political situation in region, and we hope that in the future we will have more champions participating and that we will have a racing academy for which young champions will graduate," he noted.

The role of FIA is to support and supervise this event. "We supervise the organization of the rally to make sure that the rules, international standards of all stages are respected in addition to ensuring all services are provided during this event. We also care to preserve its continuity every year. Some drivers think that the sandy land is easy and don't cause flat tires. The cooperation of KT Club and the Quarter Mile Club gives more credibility for the organization of the rally," added Nasser Khalifa Al-Attiyah.

Another victory

Sheikh Athbi Al-Sabah, head of the BMRC stated that this rally is being

held in cooperation with the Public Authority for Youth and Sports. "The Authority is supporting the Kuwaiti rally drivers yet not in the expected level. We hope that in the future they receive even more support. Also the number of participants is not bad, yet it did not meet our expectations due to the political situation in the region, and we hope that next year's rally will have a larger number of participants," he pointed out.

World champion Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah expressed his excitement to be participating in this rally and hopes to achieve another victory. "The Kuwaiti rally is precious to me especially that my beginnings and continued development in this sport were from Kuwait. Through my achievements, I proved that the Arab driver can achieve world records in this sport. I achieved my 61st title during the last rally held in Qatar. I will also be participating in next rally in Abu Dhabi with Toyota, which is a strong brand in the region," he said.

Saudi driver Rakan Al-Rashed stressed that his first goal is to finish the rally safely and then to rank in top positions. Rodolphe Asmar from



Edith Weiss is flying the female flag in the FIA.

2016 Kuwait International Rally - starters

1. Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah (QAT)/Matthieu Baumel (FRA) Skoda Fabia R5
2. Khalid Al-Suwaidi (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA) Ford Fiesta R5
3. Meshari Al-Thafiri (KWT)/Nasser Al-Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
4. Abdullah Al-Kuwari (QAT)/Adel Hussein (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
5. Khalifa Al-Attiyah (QAT)/Savvas Laos (CYP) Subaru Impreza
6. Rashid Al-Naimi (QAT)/Nicola Arena (ITA) Subaru Impreza
7. Rodolphe Asmar (LEB)/Joseph Matar (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
8. Yigit Timur (TUR)/Ufuk Uluocak (TUR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
9. Mohammed Al-Thafiri (KWT)/Fares Al-Thafiri (KWT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
10. Vedat Diker (TUR)/Erdal Oral (TUR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
11. Saleh Ali (KWT)/Othman Hamdar (KWT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
12. Rakan Al-Rashed (SAU)/Jarkko Kalliolepo (FIN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
13. Edith Weiss (DEU)/Anne Stein (DEU) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
14. Elie Chachat (KWT)/Naji Sfeir (LEB) Subaru Impreza

Lebanon is participating for the first time in the Kuwait Rally. "My first participation in the Middle East rally outside Lebanon was in Qatar last month. I don't have enough experience yet I aim to achieve a good position," he noted.

New point system

There is a new points-scoring system in this year's championship. The FIA has revised the traditional 25 points for a win, 18 for second and 15 for third-style format for FIA Regional

Rallies. In addition to these points, additional bonuses are to be awarded according to the classification of each leg on the scale of seven down to one. So the winner of the rally will be awarded 25 points, plus an additional seven for winning the second day and up to a maximum of seven more points for leading after day one. The press conference was followed by the ceremonial start and the opening 1.8km special stage, which took place at the Sirbb circuit.



Meshari Al-Thafiri chasing a podium.



Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah in his Skoda Fabia.