



EDELWEISS RACING TEAM





Morocco Desert Challenge 2023

Many thanks to our partners

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**EDELWEISS
RACING TEAM**



Edelweiss Racing Team
installing the deco kit
by ArtEdge
Development, on
Desert Fox truck





Hotel Yasmina at the foot of the dunes in Merzouga



Agadir, starting point of the MDC 2023 and first bivouac in Al Amal place



MDC 2023 itinerary



At Hotel Yasmina, the adventure really begins...





The endless dunes of Erg Chebbi as a training ground...





Numbering before technical inspection







Finally, the start of the prologue near Agadir. After Gert Duson's final recommendations, the Edelweiss set off.





The drones take aerial photos of over 300 vehicles, and the pilots enjoy a final break.







And it's off to the start on the legendary "White Beach", "Full throttle"





A few hours' sleep and it's already time to set off on the longest liaison of the rally.









Convoy arrives in Agadir

The entire bivouac from the air





Our special place.....

The ultra-cosy restaurant in the middle of the desert





The evening meal, a well-deserved moment of respite



For the mechanics, the nights are sometimes short



Navigation is crucial on a rally-raid



Extreme conditions put bikers to the test, and with temperatures in excess of 50°, an erg can turn into a death trap...



















Yann Di Mauro



Nicolas Monnin



Meydi Niculescu



Sylvain Martignoni



Rally-Raid - Swiss Edelweiss team off to a flying start at the Morocco Desert Challenge

The Swiss team set up by Neuchâtel-born Nicolas Monnin, Dakar 2022 runner-up, entered the North African event last spring with three new drivers, two mechanics and an entire support structure. And despite a broken rib, it was a successful baptism of fire!

This year, they have already taken part in the Morocco Desert Challenge. This is a motorcycle, car and truck rally that takes place, as you'd expect, in Morocco, once a year. The rules are basically the same as those of the world rally-raid championship, with a few exceptions.

"They" are the Edelweiss Racing team, a Swiss rally team that is a little more than a team whose aim is to achieve the best possible ranking in one or more competitions.

Created a few years ago (just before the pandemic) by Nicolas Monnin, an amateur motorcycle rally-raid racer from Neuchâtel, the structure's main aim is to pass on the passion for the discipline to a new generation, by providing them with the best possible support in their first steps into this rich and complex world.

Until this year, the adventures of the Edelweiss team, limited in particular by the constraints of the pandemic, were concentrated on a single driver, Nicolas, who, at 52, nevertheless managed the feat of completing the Dakar in January, in Saudi Arabia. Not without a few unforeseen events (see our article), and in the course of the adventure he was able to put to the test experimental equipment used in research for one of his partners, the Swiss engineering school ARC.

At the end of 2022, three new drivers joined the team: Meydi Niculescu from Neuchâtel, a young rally novice, Sylvain Martignoni from Valais, an enduro enthusiast but also a rally novice, and Yann Di Mauro from Vaud, who already had some experience of the discipline.

Herbert Brunner from Solothurn, another enduro racer who had already shown an interest in the Edelweiss team before the pandemic, joined the team as a mechanic. What's more, he's brought with him a real assistance truck, a converted former fire engine!

Yann's father, Paolo Di Mauro, who has had many off-road motorcycle adventures (especially in enduro), also offered to be a mechanic. Meydi's family was also on board, helping out with communication and organizational tasks.

This time, Swiss brand Scott Sports was the team's equipment partner. And Jura-based Axxios, a specialist in nana-technologies, was on hand to validate some of its technical advances on the four riders' bikes. Each of these riders also brought their own sponsors to the Morocco Desert Challenge.

The Morocco Desert Challenge could not take place during the pandemic. The 2023 edition offered participants **8 stages** in April, from Agadir to Merzouga, covering just over 2,400 km (more info on the Morocco Desert Challenge website). All of this with almost no connecting sections, and passages through the great dunes (erg Chegaga and erg Chebbi, in particular). A fine challenge for riders, some of whom had never set foot on a motorcycle in the real African desert.

It was also a tricky adventure, given the already high temperatures and the team's mix of bikes. Nicolas "loaned" his Honda CRF 450 Rally (created by RS Moto in Italy) to Meydi, and brought out his "old" KTM rally bike. Yann took the same Honda as Nicolas, and Sylvain arrived with his GasGas (originally a KTM).

To avoid any unpleasant surprises, the whole team travelled to Morocco shortly before the start of the Morocco Desert Challenge, to get to grips with the dunes and sand.

We didn't come to the Morocco Desert Challenge to get a good ranking," explains Nicolas Monnin, who has nothing left to prove. It was more a question of getting new Swiss drivers into the saddle, and proving our organization as a team on the ground."

On the **first stage**, Yann came 60th (out of 70), while Nicolas, Sylvain and Meydi were a little further back in the bike and quad rankings.

And then, on the longer **stage 2**, the times fell, with Yann in 36th place, Meydi 48th, Sylvain and Nicolas Slème and 52nd. Yann went from strength to strength, finishing tenth at the **end of stage 5**.

Unfortunately for Nicolas, he crashed on **stage 3**, damaging his bike and breaking a rib in the process. Paolo will drive the KTM back to the bivouac to carry out the necessary repairs. Nicolas, for his part, will **skip two stages**.

Stage 6 was then cancelled for the motorcycles, mainly due to the death of a competitor, who was found next to his motorcycle. Apparently dead from exhaustion, he could not be rescued in time despite the presence of a GPS beacon on his vehicle. The day before, another fatality - that of a navigator in a two-car accident - had to be confirmed.

Meydi also did his team proud, taking sixteenth place on the eighth and final stage. Yann came 14th overall, and Nicolas was determined to complete the last two stages, despite a broken rib.

At the end of the Morocco Desert Challenge 2023, the Edelweiss team proved that it has what it takes to complete a difficult rally, both in terms of navigation and physical conditions. This goes far beyond the drivers and their technical, physical and mental skills. Added to this is a whole team, whose assistance played an essential role.

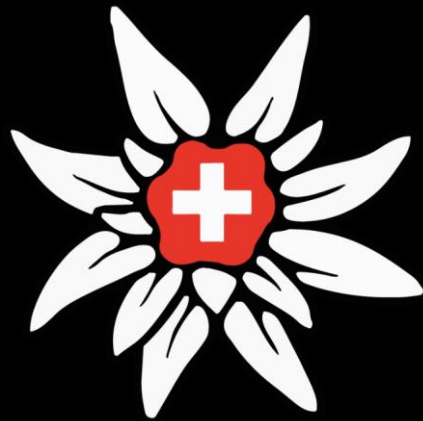
"There were a number of competitors and others who even contacted us to ask if we could provide assistance in this form for other rallies," recounts Florin Niculescu, Meydi's father, who accompanied the team on its Moroccan adventure.

After returning to Switzerland, it's time to take stock of the team's future plans. On the possible arrival of new recruits as pilots, on the possible training courses to be set up, on the creation of derivative products, on the competitions in which it could take part, and so on.

"It's still a bit early to say what we're going to do, all together or more fractionally," says Nicolas. But the Morocco Desert Challenge was really a very positive experience." Some new projects have already been launched: the creation of an energy drink called Edelweiss Energy, and the setting up of a continuing education platform in Morocco. These will probably come to fruition by 2024.

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See you soon for new adventures!!!



BUGGY





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