



Alonso Achieves First Rally Podium Finish With Toyota Gazoo Racing

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Fernando Alonso posted his first rally raid podium finish with Toyota Gazoo Racing when he and co-driver Marc Coma claimed third place on the four-day Al Ula-Neom Cross-Country Rally in Saudi Arabia on Saturday (9 November). It was the first trophy for the Spanish pair since they began their preparations for the 2020 Dakar event less than three months ago.

“The final stage was a difficult one, full of rocks and difficult navigation, but we had no real issues, finishing third on the stage and third overall,” said two-time Formula 1 Champion Alonso. “This our first rally raid podium and I’m very happy with that. We’ve had four good days in Saudi Arabia.”

The event presented Alonso and Coma with the new challenge of competing on unfamiliar terrain against a field of local rally raid specialists. The first two of four stages brought around 135 miles driving each day over open desert, stony landscapes and rocky paths. In spite of driving through dust thrown up by runners at the front of the field, Alonso and Coma held fourth place at the end of the first stage, less than eight minutes behind the leaders.

The second day’s action followed a similar route, with the Toyota pair pushing to close the gap, only to lose around two-and-a-half minutes to repair a puncture. Nonetheless, they maintained a solid fourth place by the stage finish. For the closing two stages the action moved to Neom on the Red Sea coast where conditions were equally challenging. Alonso and Coma showed strong pace to hold third place going into the final day when they again demonstrated excellent speed and competitiveness.

The rally raid was the last of three competitions for the Toyota Gazoo Racing pair in their intensive preparation programme for the 2020 Dakar Rally. Alonso and Coma will undertake more private testing before joining their team-mates for the event in January, taking place for the first time in Saudi Arabia.

Glyn Hall, Team Principal, was happy with the progress made: “Fernando and Marc showed great pace this week, and I’m happy that they are progressing according to our plan,” he said.

“We had a strategy for this race, and it worked out perfectly for them. They raced a brand-new car here, which is earmarked for the Dakar Rally, so they had to balance their pace with the need to preserve the car. In the end, they achieved a maiden podium against local crews who know the terrain very well, which bodes well for January’s Dakar Rally. It was also interesting for us to experience Saudi Arabia first-hand and gain some insight for the big race in the New

Year.”

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