



Bahrain's senior men's national football team kicked off last night their final local training gathering ahead of their much-awaited title-defence in the 25th Gulf Cup, which takes place next month in Iraq. Yesterday's session was held at the Hamad Town Football Stadium, supervised by national team head coach Helio Sousa. The Portuguese tactician has called up a squad of 25 players for their preparations. Bahrain are in Group B for the eight-nation competition, along with the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait. Group A features Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Oman and hosts Iraq. Above, left, players take part in drills during training; while above, right, star midfielder Ali Madan at the team's session last night.



BRX primed for toughest test as Dakar stretches into empty quarter

Sebastien Loeb raring to go as he leads four-car challenge by Bahrain Raid Xtreme in Saudi Arabia

● **Loeb aims to build on last year's Dakar performance in the Prodrive Hunter T1+ that gave BRX eight stage podium finishes overall**

TDI | Manama

Bahrain Raid Xtreme head into their third Dakar Rally on Saturday with a four-car team of sustainably-fuelled Prodrive Hunters tested, developed and ready for the biggest adventure in the world of motorsport.

The 45th edition of the rally tackles some of the toughest desert terrain seen in recent years, and after winning two of the four World Rally Raid Championship events in 2022, the BRX team is raring to go, with car updates, new staff and a hunger for what lies ahead in Saudi Arabia.

After taking runner up spot 12 months ago, Sebastien Loeb returns to action with Fabian Lurquin looking to build on last year's performance in the



Sebastien Loeb in action

Prodrive Hunter T1+ that gave BRX eight stage podium finishes overall.

Argentine Orly Terranova, who drove another Prodrive Hunter to fourth place in the 2022 Dakar, will be accompanied by Spaniard Alex Haro who guided him to a superb second place on the Rallye du Maroc in October.

BRX will also be running the GCK Motorsport Hunter for Guerlain Chicherit and Alex Winocq, who together scored a stunning victory first time out on the Rallye du Maroc. Completing the team line-up will be Lithuanians Vaidotas Zala and Paulo Fiuza.

Nine-time World Rally Champion Loeb said: "We have a very



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SEBASTIEN LOEB

good car for Dakar after excellent preparation in Morocco and Andalucia, proving that we're right up there with the performance of the Hunter.

"Fabian and I are ready to go. We will try to be consistent and get some clean stages with no problems. We will have some long days in the dunes and that's where you have to stay focused, but that is our target this year. We're looking forward to it."

Terranova said: "I've been training hard for this, my 15th Dakar. The first week we all know will be hard, with many kilometres to be tackled over new terrain in Saudi Arabia.



Runner up in the Dakar last year, Sebastien Loeb returns to action with co-driver Fabian Lurquin. The pair won the Andalucia Rally in October

That will test us, so we must be concentrated and in the best possible shape."

Chicherit said: "I am very happy to attempt my 12th Dakar with a competitive and reliable car. It is difficult to announce a goal at this moment, but all I can say is we have a good car that will allow Alex and I to fight until the end."

As part of the BRX drive towards alternative motorsport solutions, each Hunter will again run on Prodrive EcoPower biofuel, created by Coryton from

sustainable sources, which produces 80% less CO2 than petrol. Engineers have also made subtle but important modifications to the cars following extensive tests in the searing heat of the Sahara desert.

Dakar 2023 is the biggest undertaking from Prodrive in recent years, with huge logistical coordination from all over Europe. This saw 27 vehicles shipped from Marseille to Jeddah in late November ready for the team to get to the first bivouac at Sea Camp, north of Jeddah, this week.

The route of Dakar 2023 will be the longest for over ten years and one the organisers promise will be harder than the previous three editions in the Kingdom, venturing into the Empty Quarter for the first time.

Starting on Saturday with an 11km prologue stage at Sea Camp on the shores of the Red Sea, the rally finishes on the opposite side of the Arabian Peninsula at Dammam on 15 January. The total distance is 8,550 kms, similar to driving from Jeddah to Shanghai, with 4,705kms of special stages.

BRAVE CF kicks off 2023 with a return trip to Serbia on February 18th

TDI | Manama

BRAVE Combat Federation will kickstart the 2023 calendar with a bang as the fastest-growing MMA organization returns to Serbia for BRAVE CF 69 on February 18th.

Belgrade will again host BRAVE CF following the raging success of BRAVE CF 56, which took place late last year and was rounded off by an impressive main event between Slobodan Maksimovic and Rolando Dy, with the likes of Abdullah Al-Qahtani, Ahmed Labban, and Borislav Nikolic earning important wins.

2022 was a year to remember for BRAVE Combat Federation, with new territories reached.



Germany became the 28th nation to host BRAVE CF when Bonn entertained thousands of European MMA fans at BRAVE CF 61 - confirming BRAVE CF's status as the most-travelled MMA promotion on the planet.

Next year will see BRAVE CF further honour its promise of taking MMA to new and various corners of the world, and the return trip to Belgrade will reaffirm BRAVE Combat Federation's commitment to helping

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grow the booming Balkan MMA scene. For more information, visit www.bravecf.com.

Chelsea win tempered by fresh injury concern for James

AFP | London

Chelsea returned to winning ways in their first appearance after the World Cup break, but delight at their 2-0 home victory over Bournemouth on Tuesday was tempered by new injury concern for Reece James.

The England right back lasted only 53 minutes on his return from the knee injury that ruled him out of the World Cup in Qatar, leaving Chelsea fearing the worst as they await a more detailed examination and prognosis.

"He's not good but we'll have to wait and see. It's too early



Reece James looks dejected after sustaining an injury

for me to speculate but whenever he comes off like that, it is not positive," manager Graham Potter said.

Eight minutes into the second half, James signalled to the bench that he needed to come off before going down in some discomfort.