

4TH ANNUAL BAJA RALLY

North America's First Dakar Style Off-road Race

Words: Eric Hall Photos: Justin W. Coffey

The BAJA RALLY is Mexico's eco-adventure challenge attracting athletes and fans from all over the world. Combining competition with navigation, and a lighter footprint, BAJA RALLY is a motorized cultural and historical lesson for participants, fans and locals alike who visit this region directly adjacent to Southern California, which could be considered the largest off-road racing market in the world. The race aims to showcase the visual beauty of Baja's landscapes and its dynamic terrain by way of Rally Bike!

Validating Rally Raid appeal, the 2016 BAJA RALLY doubled from previous years boasting at least thirteen countries being represented at the start in Ensenada. The competitors were broken into four classes: Rally Pro, Rally 1, ADV Expert & UTV. Newcomer and Southern California native Garrett Poucher (#25) shocked the field with his prologue victory only to be sidelined the next day by a crash, injuring his wrist. Additionally, a new "ADV Expert" class was added this year as the result of Lawrence Hacking's (Ontario, Canada) leadership.



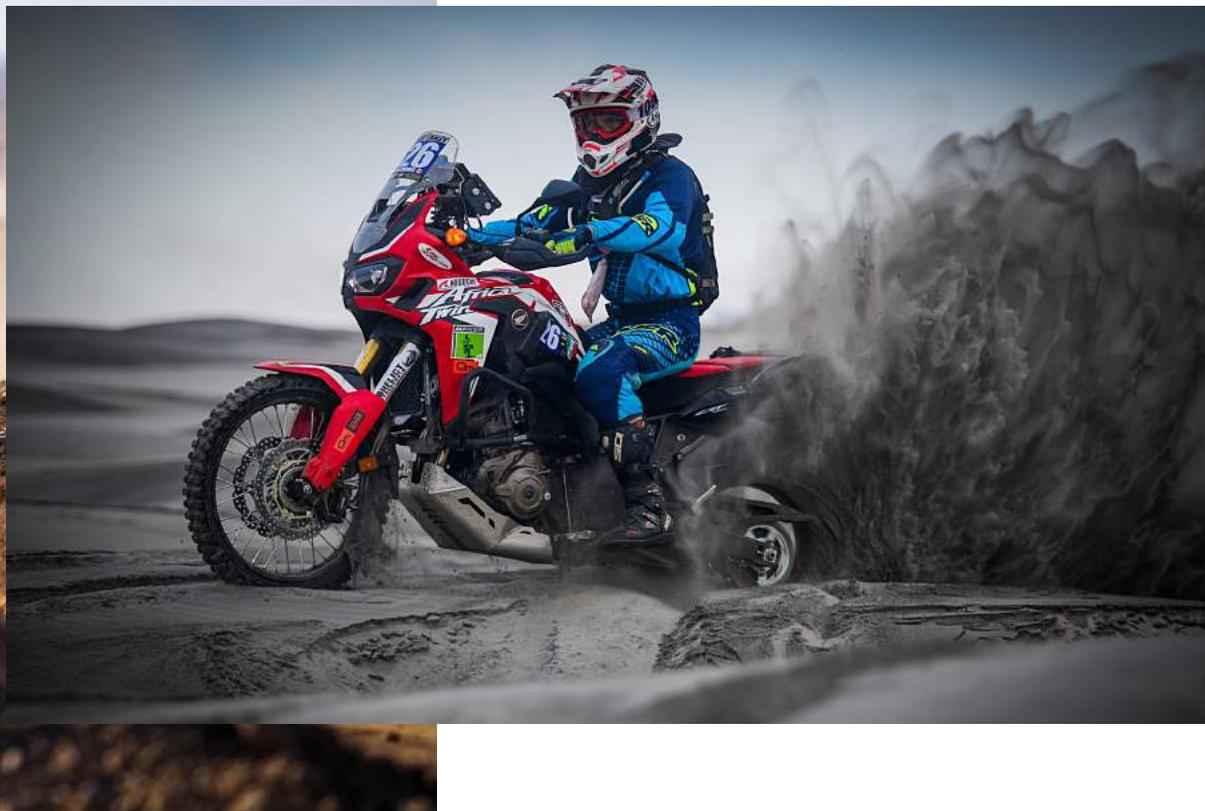




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Hacking also went on to win the class on his brand-new and nearly stock Honda CRF1000L Africa Twin. ADV riders were initially told they'd be racing an abbreviated course but that was quickly scrapped as organizers saw that these big "Adventure" machines could hang with the commonly more swift and agile rally bikes. UTVs had an increased showing with four teams participating this year. They even received some camera time, which the BAJA RALLY hopes to leverage into more sponsorships next year. Although previous BAJA RALLY headline riders Quinn Cody & Cameron Steele were unable to attend, the race was quite competitive with top riders such as Steve Hengeveld, Trent Burgiss and Gerardo "Nino" Rojas trading leads!





As is the case with any rally raid, logistics sometimes played a role in keeping organizers and racers on their toes. Cargo containers showed up with bikes at the last moment, delayed by a missed crucial stamp on the European side of the trip, but ultimately were cleared just in time for racers to re-fill with oil/coolant/gas and pass scrutineering. Communications with airborne relay teams proved challenging against inclement weather and a marine layer resulting in Special Stage Three's unscheduled delay and subsequent shortening of the day's route by about 100km. Not bad for an event that doubled in size from the previous year... BAJA RALLY Director, Scotty Bloom, credits this fortune to the expansion of his team, professionally, and the choice to delegate more bodies and minds to each functional area of the event. Bloom says, "I've never been more sure in our team, our event and our future than I am today. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for and pride in our focus on safety. There is no question in my mind that Baja Rally '17 will sell out all 100 entries!"

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UNOFFICIAL RESULTS

Rally Pro

1. Steve Hengeveld, #1
2. Trent Burgiss, #13
3. Gerardo Nino, #24

Rally 1

1. Ton Gurule, #15
2. Francisco Checchini, #67
3. James Mitchell, #9

ADV Expert

1. Lawrence Hacking, #26
2. Keith Billings, #81
3. Casey Hilliard, #53

UTV

1. Bob Jones, #4U
2. Polo Buchanan, #23U
3. Patrick Witt, #14U



