

The PEUGEOT 2008 DKR clocks up testing kilometres in France



As the countdown to the 2015 Dakar Rally begins to accelerate, the Peugeot-Total squad is continuing to develop the fearsome PEUGEOT 2008 DKR at a frenetic pace with its three star drivers, including Cyril Despres, who is getting to grips with competing on four wheels for the first time.

From 7am, Team Peugeot-Total is in action. Like a commando unit on a mission, the mechanics invade the test centre at Château Lastours, where the PEUGEOT 2008 DKR is about to begin a new phase of its development – generating impatience and anticipation in equal measure. Every single minute counts. For the first time, the three crews that constitute Peugeot's dream team will all take turns behind the wheel. Following shakedown tests at Freneuse, Monthléry and Creusot elsewhere in France, the beast now has the opportunity to demonstrate its mettle across rocky terrain that offers a foretaste of the kind of adventure that awaits it in South America. Now that Carlos Sainz has drawn upon his experience to identify the inevitable initial teething troubles, his two new team-mates have also come along to help out. On the programme is validation of the modifications made to the chassis and cooling system.

Stéphane Peterhansel settles into the high-perched cockpit of his new mount. The French multiple Dakar winner wastes little time in heading towards this track, which represents a real challenge – even for a vehicle that aspires to the life of a trailblazer. As the kilometres pass by, Stéphane confesses to experiencing a genuine culture shock: "Switching over to two-wheel-drive changes everything!" he cheerfully reflects.

Subsequent runs only serve to confirm this first impression: "I've never previously driven a car with so much suspension travel. The first big surprise is the manner in which the PEUGEOT 2008 DKR soaks up potholes and compressions. I've always been accustomed to getting thrown around like a rag doll inside the cockpit, but the behaviour of the PEUGEOT 2008 DKR is infinitely more efficient and smooth. Whenever you fear an impending impact, the suspension and large-diameter wheels absorb it. That is a reassuring feeling, which allows you to pass over potholes at 120kph or 130kph rather than just 80kph. I'll need to adapt my driving style accordingly..." All the more so, indeed, as this beast is truly alive! "Being two-wheel-drive, the PEUGEOT 2008 DKR is a bit livelier and as such, demands a defter and more precise touch behind the wheel since it is not quite as easy to control. You really need to always be at the point of sliding. Apart from that, the engine and gearbox both feel good, and while we are still inevitably a long way from finding the ideal set-up, initial impressions are excellent – there is plenty of potential here."

So what awaits Cyril Despres? The former motorcyclist – a five-time Dakar winner on two wheels – is embarking upon a new career on four wheels. As the clock ticks down towards his leap into the unknown, he is oscillating between impatience and a hint of anxiety that he is doing his best to conceal. Following a sighting run in the passenger seat alongside Peterhansel to establish his bearings, the moment comes to take to the wheel himself for the first time: with his eyes full of wonder and grinning from cheek-to-cheek, he is like a kid at Christmas. Under the watchful gaze of team members – who are well aware that they are witnessing history being made – he fires up the engine and sets off in determined mood for his maiden test outing. After completing several dozen kilometres, he returns to base, with tears of emotion intermingling with beads of sweat. “That was crazy!” he exclaims, visibly awestruck by the experience. “In every possible area, it’s far better than I had ever imagined it would be! And what’s more, I’m still a long way from pushing flat-out and exploring its full potential...”



He does admit to the engineers, however, to having made a small mistake: “At one stage, I briefly relaxed my concentration. I missed a down shift and must have over-revved the engine slightly...” Gilles Picard, two times a Dakar winner alongside Luc Alphand and a former motorcyclist himself, is nonetheless very satisfied with the four-wheeled debut of his new driver: “He’s impressed me, this kid. He has a very neat driving style!”

Not far away, Carlos Sainz is already in the process of settling himself into the PEUGEOT 2008 DKR’s snug cockpit. He was on-site for Cyril’s debut and watched over him with the nurturing and encouraging manner of an older brother: “I am convinced that he will do a good job, and to that end, I am ready to help him where needed. Stéphane and others have demonstrated that motorcyclists possess the necessary mind-set to also perform well in cars, and I know that Cyril is a formidable competitor.” The programme drawn up by the team’s engineers filled the summer months and did not really allow the three crews to take any long holidays. The test sessions will continue to come thick and fast right up until the eagerly-anticipated expedition to South America.

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- MI201406240041 - Story clip (English)
- MI201406240042 - Story clip (French)
- MI201406240043 - Story clip (Spanish)
- MI201406240044 - TV news cut (English)
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CONTACTS

RED BULL

Vera Dussausaye / International Motorsports Communication

Mob.: +41 79 106 61 94

vera.dussausaye@redbullmotorsports.com

PEUGEOT SPORT

Cécile Estenave / Communication

Mob.: +33 (0)6 72 82 74 08 - Tel.: +33 (0)1 30 70 20 63

cecile.estenave@peugeot.com

Stéphanie Val / Communication

Mobile : +33 (0)6 08 54 40 10 - Tél : +33 (0)1 30 70 20 63

Stephanie.val@ext.mpsa.com