

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN PRIVATEER RIDES WITH THE BEST IN WORLD CHAMPS

THREE broken ribs and a dislocated shoulder did not stop Australian privateer motorcycle rider Christophe Barriere-Varju from placing 14th at the first round of the cross-country FIM World Championships in Argentina this week on the first day.

Competing against Dakar Rally winner Marc Coma, Nelson Bay resident Christophe put the injuries he sustained eight weeks ago in the deserts of Africa to combat the sand dunes and salt pans of Argentina and Chile.

Having not ridden a motorcycle since Dakar to let his injuries heal, Christophe managed to place 14th on the first day from San Martin de Los Ander to Neuquen, a 458km stage, arriving just 37 minutes after Marc Coma.

At 799km, day 2 was the longest stage of the Las Pampas Rally. Yet Christophe managed to end the day in 16th position.

Day 3 started with 65km of dunes, normally a specialty of Christophe. But riding with a weakened body, he lacked the strength to hold his bike.

“It was a frustrating day as I could not go as fast as I wanted in case I fell on my weak ribs,” Christophe said. “Instead I had to ride slowly which is very difficult in soft sand.”

Christophe had to let go of his 200kg KTM 660 Rallye bike more than 50 times during the stage, which meant he then had to pull it back up or drag it down the dunes.

“Having to lift a 200kg bike 50 times definitely took the wind out of me,” Christophe said. “But the real problem was that each effort weakened the ribs.”

In the morning, a tired Christophe faced the impressive altitudes of the Andes in the 91km fourth stage.

“At 3500m, climbing through the clouds was magnificent,” Christophe said. “Because it was fairly cold, most riders made the mistake of not drinking enough water, and the lack of oxygen made them dizzy.”

Misfortune was also to strike Christophe. Just 2km before the end of the special he made an error and hit the ground, the fall snapping another rib.

“I think it was bound to happen,” Christophe said. “At least it was at slow speed and the rib did not go through the lung.” He had only been nine minutes away from stage winner Marc Coma.

Christophe knew the broken rib meant he would yet again have to retire from a cross-country race – as in Dakar. But just as in Dakar, when he made it through 220km of pain

riding with three broken ribs and shoulder injuries, Christophe put his gears back on and headed to the track for a two-rider pursuit race around a motocross track.

Christophe won the duel, despite slipping in the last corner and losing 25 seconds in the race. But more importantly to him, without the fall, he would have finished fourth and one position ahead of official KTM factory rider Jordi Viladoms.

“Although this race finished again a little early, I have learned a lot about the speed required and improved my navigation skills dramatically,” Christophe said.

“I will now listen to the doctors and heal properly, but despite the risks, I am glad I came to the Las Pampas Rally...riding through the clouds was an amazing experience!”

Christophe will be back in Australia on 21 March and available for interviews.

Tel: +61 403 444 101

Email: cbv@cbvglobal.com

<http://www.cbvglobal.com/>

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