

A HERO at the start, a LEGEND at the finish

The ride will be open to 50 teams, starting in Paris, finishing in Dakar.

Each team may have **3 riders** and they need **1 motorbike** and **1 support vehicle**.

The bike to be used in Heroes Legend is the Yamaha XT-500. The very first Paris-Dakar rally was won on an XT-500 and Hubert Auriol also entered his first rally on the XT-500. Don't we all want one in our (most of the time imaginary) private collection of motorbikes! If you haven't enjoyed the kick-starter biting back, you haven't lived a full life. Those who have mastered the fine art of starting an XT-500 know how rewarding this bike is. Ride this bike with respect and you will agree and truly know why it is the legend and an eminent fit for this ride. It has made history and you may relive it.

The **support vehicle** may be any 4x4. In Africa the support vehicles stay on the road as much as possible although sometimes the rough stuff is a lot more comfortable than the potholed roads. A 4x4 is necessary because some of the liaisons will be on more difficult off-road terrain. There is a competition between the support vehicles as well, but not based on speed. This will be about navigation and efficiency. These results will also count in the overall results of the teams.

The **riders** are enthusiasts that are up to a special adventure. Together they will make sure that their XT reaches Dakar. You may decide yourselves who will be riding on any day so this may or may not vary. We expect people from all over Europe or even beyond and we have already been contacted by people from France, Belgium, The Netherlands and the UK.

The ride is an answer to most of the professional races that are organised nowadays in which competition comes at mostly insurmountable costs for the average rider, both financially as well as physically. This ride is meant to be enjoyed instead of endured. We want to see broad smiles from start to finish. Rule number one: help each other. We all have the same goal, getting to Dakar without damage to man or machine. In Heroes Legend you do stop for a fellow rider even if it may hurt your result. Do not think this will be a walk through the park though. There are some fair distances to cover each day and the terrain may be hard going.

Our aim is to make this event **possible for everyone**. Amongst others by keeping the costs low, but also by keeping the speed - thanks limited power of the XT-500 compared to modern bikes - to an acceptable level. This reduces the risks and it also makes the difference between the riders smaller because even a top rider can not chance ruining his engine by going flat out all the time.



The spirit of the first rally's.

We will relive the early days of desert rallying. The start on February 18th will be at the same spot in Paris as in the very first Dakar. So will the prologue in Orléans. The ride will go through Perpignan and Valencia, all the way to Almería where we will board the ferry to Morocco.

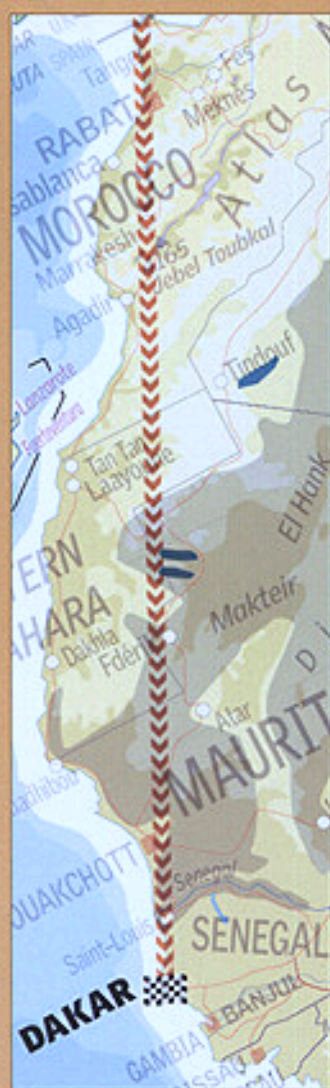
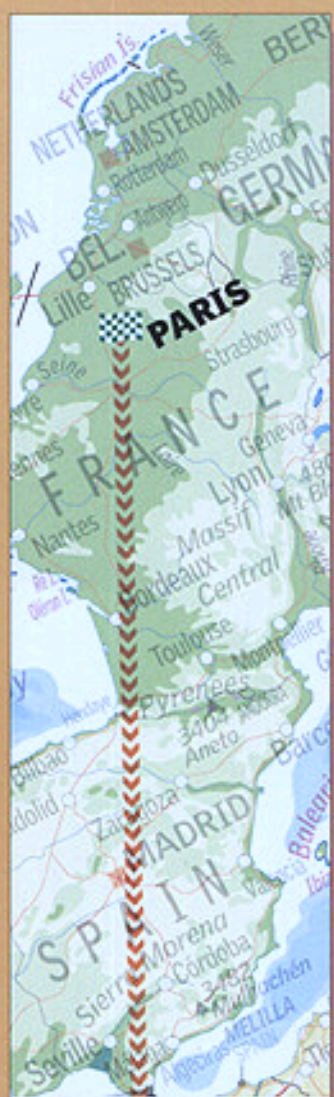
In Morocco the road book will send us to Nador, Fez, Marrakech, Tan-Tan and Dakhla before we cross the border with Mauritania. At Saint Louis we will enter Senegal and we will reach Dakar on March 3rd. Next day, as in the first Dakar, there will be the last special at the beach of Lac Rose.

In Europe the bikes are allowed to do the liaisons in the back of a van or on the trailer. Just the specials are obligated and so is the first liaison (which is from the start at the Eiffeltower to the prologue in Orléans). All friends and family are allowed to accompany the riders on their way to the boat. In Europe, participants will take care of their own travel costs. The organisation will arrange hotels for those who need it. There will also be a parc fermé.

After waving family goodbye, we will take the night boat to Morocco. From here, the bikes will ride 4200 km till Dakar. This will be done in 11 days by the 3 team members. This means, 1 day on the bike, then 2 days 'resting' in the support car, giving assistance to the man on the bike (refuelling, repairs). This way, each member can do 1400 kilometres on the bike.

Because safety is rule number one, we will have a system like Iritrack on the bikes, which will assure us of the position of each bike. We want every bike to reach the finish!

For those not wanting to buy an XT-500 or a 4x4, we will be able to offer a lease XT or lease 4x4. Also, we will arrange a one-day off-road course for the inexperienced and also a one day technical/navigation course.



The Yamaha XT500: the origin of off-road riding

Legendary bike has its 30 years anniversary in 2006

The only motorbike allowed in the Heroes Legend is the Yamaha XT-500. The very first Paris-Dakar rally was won on a Yamaha XT-500 and also Hubert Auriol entered his first rally on the XT-500. Don't we all want one in our (most of the time imaginary) private collection of motorbikes! If you haven't enjoyed the kick-starter biting back, you haven't lived a full life. Those who have mastered the fine art of starting an XT-500 know how rewarding this bike is. Ride this bike with respect and you will agree and truly know why it is the legend and an eminent fit for this ride. It has made history and you may relive it. The bike came in production in 1976, so it will have its 30th birthday during our ride!

First off-road bike

The XT500 was projected for the USA market, meant to be used in the desert baja's. This made the XT the first real off-road bike. Before that, there were a lot of road-going big single cylinder four stroke bikes (mostly English). For off-road the choice was restricted to two stroke motocross bikes, not legal for road use. The XT had it all. It opened a new market for a new hobby: off-road riding.

Side effect was that with the XT, it was now possible to do large distance desert races. The rest, as we know, is history.

Cult-bike

Yamaha released the XT-500 in 1976 and had it in production until the 80's. Some 60.000 XT were sold in Europe and now, 30 years later, thousands of XT are still in use. The bike really earned its cult status.

XT on retirement

In its young days, the XT scared a lot of riders. It had a reputation of being able to shoot his rider off the bike with its fierce backlash. After you mastered the starting procedure, the bike rewarded you with a smooth ride on the big thumper.

The bike is now in its old days, more interested in long journeys than in competing with modern equipment.

Technical features

- single cylinder four-stroke 500cc
- drum brakes
- twin shocks
- dry sump (frame doubles as oil cooler)
- 27 HP / 138 kilograms
- Reliable through simple techniques
- Suitable for long travels, for road and off-road using

Technical requirements for the bike

The XT500 needs to be technically safe at the start of every leg. This means brakes and lights need to work and the bike should be in good condition.

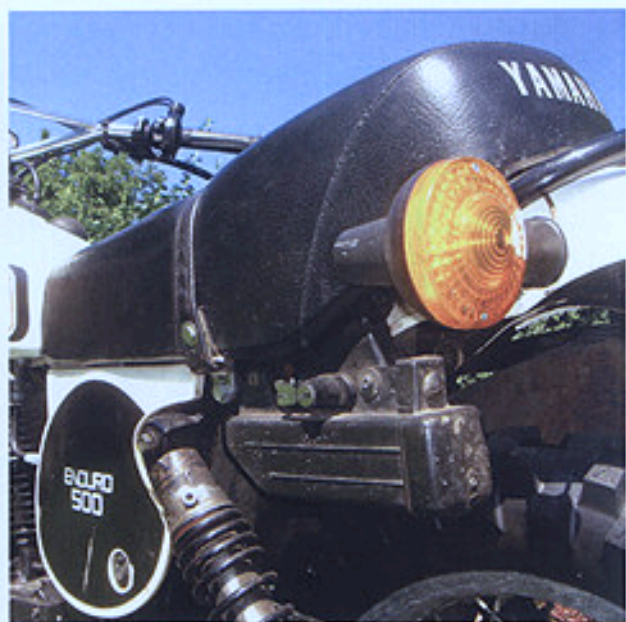
It is not our intention to make life unnecessarily difficult during scrutineering, but we don't want to see real old bangers. So tyres, spokes, chain and sprockets, bearings, cables etcetera must be in good condition.

It is allowed to improve the bike as long as it remains an XT500, so:

- Mounting better shock absorbers is allowed, but monoshocks are not.
- A better fork is allowed, but no upside down types.
- It's OK to improve the brakes, but disc brakes are not allowed.
- Improving the engine is allowed, but no replacing the engine or head by another type.
- Strengthening the frame is allowed, but it has to be an XT500 frame.

In short, we are applying a sort of 'box rule'. If it looks like an XT500, smells like an XT500 and sounds like an XT500, then it must be an XT500 even if it goes like a rocket.

ENDURO 500





Hubert Auriol (Addis Abeba, June 7th, 1952) took part in 16 Dakar rally's and won three of them. Twice on the bike, once by car. He became race director in 1995 and did a wonderful job until he left the rally in 2003.

HUBERT AURIOL RETURNS TO THE DESERT

The eyes of Hubert Auriol light up when he tells his story. The sparkle in his eyes shows his deep feelings on the subject. "When will I be satisfied with the result? When I see the same sparkle in the eyes of the participants. That means that I have done a good job. I will have helped people fulfil a dream and be happy".

Auriol, for years the driving force behind Paris-Dakar, is obviously a happy man himself. He is about to return to the desert once again, this time on the classic Yamaha XT-500. Letting ordinary people fulfil their lifelong dreams. In this way Heroes Legend is a dream come true as well. "As a young boy all I wanted to do was ride a motorbike across Africa. Now I see that same desire in others. This is what I most prefer to do together with people. Share my passion: head for the desert on a motorbike. Heroes Legend fills that gap."

This plan had already been brewing for quite some time. The choice of motorbike in this first year of Heroes Legend will be restricted to the Yamaha XT-500, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of this legendary bike. The XT-500 brings back fond memories to Auriol (53). He rode a Yamaha XT-500 in his first Dakar Rally in 1979. "Back then it was the only motorbike that you could use for such an adventure. It wasn't built for that job at all, but despite that it was the only motorbike that could cope with the circumstances. It was the first real off-road production motorbike. I had to put up a real fight to get my first XT-500. Every batch that came from Japan was sold out already before it arrived in port in Europe. It cost me a rib and a lot of persuasion to get hold of one."

Auriol considers the XT-500 to be a true masterpiece. The machine hit the market at exactly the right moment. "This bike is a legend itself. It marks the beginning of a new era. Riding it was an adventure. The noise, the vibrations Half of the time it was a nightmare as well. Starting the engine for instance was nothing short of a drama if you did not have the knack. For some it was black magic. It required some insight and dexterity, which I had fortunately. So in the rally every morning I ended up helping other riders to get their bikes going..."

It appears that Auriol hasn't lost that touch of magic. At the first sight of a XT-500 he wants to try to start the engine. He kick-starts the engine. Nothing. "I have overdone it. Try again." A stern look at the machine follows and he kicks it again. With some protest the engine splutters and then starts running. "Tadaaaa! Auriol exclaims enthusiastically. I can still do it!"

Auriol is going to put all his knowledge and rally expertise into organizing Heroes Legend. He will be setting out the route, organize the bivouacs and lead the race. He warns: "It is not a remake of the first Paris-Dakar rally. That went through Algeria and Niger, which is not possible at the moment. But I am going to capture the spirit of that inaugural rally in Heroes Legend. That is why we begin at the begin: with the Yamaha XT-500. It has to remind us of the past. And we want people to help each other along the way, like we used to. I want all participants to reach the finish. It has to be an adventure in the first place, the racing aspect comes second. It has to remain fun and within reach, both technically and financially, for everybody. That is why we have teams in which every team member may ride the XT-500. They can swap places in their support vehicles."

The bivouacs will be small scaled. Just a couple of helicopters for press and organization, but no airplanes. "This way we are not dependent on airstrips and we can set up camp anywhere we want."

Auriol is looking forward to setting out the route for this Heroes Legend through Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal. He is planning to do this on a Yamaha XT-500 so he can judge exactly whether the machine will be able to cope with all the challenges along the way. "You can not go over dunes of powder sand. At 30 years of age, no motorbike will be able to cope. Even the XT-500 won't. You can't ride it like we used to. In those days Renault 4's were part of the Dakar rally as well. They would not be able to climb those dunes either. However, that will not mean it is not going to be a marvellous adventure. It will be. That is a promise."

The people behind Heroes Legend

"It all started as a joke ..."

The Heroes Legend organisation is in the hands of a partly French and partly Dutch group of experienced rally riders and organisers. The initiative for the rally was originally just coined as an idea by Dutch Dakarist Henk Verschuren. This 'ordinary guy with an adventurous streak' was musing about the chances of an XT500 in the real Dakar and the conclusion was "that you could still win it if they were all on XT500's". This joke turned serious when it was taken up by businessman and long time Paris-Dakar sponsor Roel den Braven. Known for his can-do-attitude and short lead-times, Roel has been the driving force in making this happen. In the mean time another serious off-road and rally enthusiast and successful entrepreneur Peter van den Bosch (van den Bosch Transporten) has joined this team. Henk, Roel and Peter together bring passion for the sport, a business-like attitude where it is needed, necessary contacts in the rally-world and the financial backing to achieve a common goal: organising the Heroes Legend.

Henk Verschuren has been involved in motor sports for many years. In the early days he spent his time mainly on smooth tarmac, nowadays he can be found in the dirt. Henk participated in the 2003 Paris-Dakar Rally (dropped out after 10 days) and prior to Paris-Dakar trained in Andorra, Portugal and Egypt (Pharaoh Rally). Henk: "I have changed since being involved in the Paris-Dakar. I have matured and realise nowadays that having fun on your bike should be the first objective." And obviously it was a very mature decision to for instance join up with Harry de Jong last year to participate in the Amsterdam-Dakar Challenge last year at the very last moment on two ancient XT500's. All other participants in that Challenge chose to do it by car. They completed every kilometre of this 6500 km challenge on by bike, so Henk knows what to expect first hand and should be an honorary iron-man.

Roel den Braven, heavily involved in the Paris-Dakar Rally for many years through the sponsorship by his company **BELNED** of Dutch rally driver Eric Verhoef is at least as enthusiastic as Henk. Together with Eric Verhoef Roel has lived through many Dakar rally's and has experienced all the ups and downs that riders go through from near by. The loss of his dear friend John Deacon has left a deep impression, which is why Roel will be sponsoring and awarding the John Deacon trophy to the rider who is most appreciated by his fellow competitors. Roel has also been involved in the Dakar debut of Henk Verschuren. The bond of friendship which came out of this involvement has led to the actual realisation of the Heroes Legend. Roel's level of commitment and professionalism are a guarantee for success of this venture.

Peter van den Bosch entrepreneur in heart and soul but also every inch the motocross and rally rider. With his transport company Van den Bosch Transport he is of course accustomed to the HPs, the move to motocross is not really so big then, it is a real way of release, that provides him with much pleasure. In everything Peter does he is looking for big and beautiful challenges. So he also tries to find this in motocross and rally riding. As a result he knows Roel and Henk through this hobby, together they have been through many adventures such as spectacular trips in Andorra and Portugal. But the biggest challenge is yet to come with heroes legend, they will all join forces to make this splendid initiative a success and make it into an unforgettable happening for all those taking part. On hearing about the Legend Peter without hesitation immediately offered to bring his organizational skills and the logistical resources of his company *Van den Bosch Transporten* into this venture.

Hubert Auriol, well known for his participation in Le Dakar since the very first time, of course doesn't need any introduction.

He says: "I have been thinking about installing new life into the original desert ride idea and reliving the adventure of the original pioneers who started it all. My wish is to return to the original spirit of the race back in 1979, before high speeds and big budgets turned it into a media circus, returning the ride to the basics and getting participation within reach of ordinary people."

"Can you see what I mean? Imagine fifty XT500's at the start at the base of the Eiffel Tower. I remember exactly that incredible feeling as you drive down the Champs Elysees in a group right through the heart of Paris. It has been a long time since that has happened."

Auriol's enthusiasm is contagious. His long-time personal assistant Anne-Marie immediately wanted to join when she heard about this plan. "Anne-Marie is the oil in the machinery. It is also thanks to her that it is now really going to happen. "I am really looking forward to it because I am going to ride the route myself first to prepare the road book, to organise smooth transitions at the borders with as little formalities for the participants as possible and I will be in every bivouac during the race for the briefings. During the race I will be at the race course either by jeep or helicopter to oversee the smooth running of the race and to thoroughly enjoy the atmosphere. I can see it happening in my mind: in some little village to find a group of XT's where the participants have arranged an impromptu picnic to which I am invited. I am really longing to be part of it."