

Sherco TVS all set for Dakar 2018

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Experienced Spanish rider Joan Pedrero will continue to headline the Sherco TVS Rally Factory team as it prepares to conquer the 2018 Dakar Rally. He will be joined, like last time, by K.P. Aravind and Frenchman Adrien Metge.

The build-up has been encouraging, with Pedrero and Metge finishing one and two in the PanAfrica Rally in Morocco before the Barcelona rider claimed fifth place in the Oilibya Rally earlier this month.

Pedrero, who has twice finished fifth at the Dakar, came 13th in the 2017 edition. "This will be my tenth

Dakar; so it is special," the 39-year-old said here on Monday. "We've done well in Africa, and my recent performance has given me the confidence to aim for a top-10 finish."

The 40th edition of the Dakar Rally (Jan 6-20, 2018) will begin in Peru and pass through Bolivia before ending in Argentina. "There are lots of sand dunes in Peru; it's going to be hard physically," said Metge, who managed 22nd place in the previous edition, his second. "In Bolivia, the altitude will be hard on the body; the weather can change drastically there, from extreme heat to cold. It can rain a lot. In Argentina there will be lots



Geared up: K.P. Aravind, left, Joan Pedrero and Adrien Metge hope to do better this time around. ■ SHREEDUTTA CHIDANANDA

of rocks. It will be gruelling."

For Aravind, this will be another learning experience. On his maiden appearance in Dakar this January, the 31-year-old from Udupi crashed out in stage three. "I'm bet-

ter prepared than last year, physically and mentally," he said. "I've spent a lot of time on the bike. I've done well in the Merzouga (21), Spanish Baja (13), PanAfrica (12) and Oilibya (15) rallies."

His navigational skills had vastly improved, Aravind felt. "I read the road-books a lot better now," he said. "I'm now familiar with the lexicon. I understand where to slow down. Now that I'm more confident with navigation, I don't have to constantly look at the roadbook; that makes me faster."

The RTR 450 that the team will ride was an improved machine, Pedrero felt. "The bikes are now more powerful, with better suspension and a new exhaust. They're more manoeuvrable," he said.

Aravind's target, for now, is to finish the Dakar.

"To me, finishing is victory."