

'First Indian ever to win motorsport world title' ended last in 3 out of 4 races

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LAST WEEK, the Federation of Motorsports Clubs of India put out a celebratory news-flash. It said: "Aishwarya Pissay of TVS clinches the Fim Baja World Cup 2019 Women's Category... #Fmsci congratulates India's first #FIM World Cup champion."

Subsequently, Aishwarya made it to the front pages of newspapers and trended on social media. The media release that was to follow had more details about 23-year-old Pissay's performance in the cross-country rally-raid arena with overall and women's categories spread across four events.

"She became the first Indian ever to win a world title in Motorsport... Aishwarya, who won the first round in Dubai and was placed third (Portugal), fifth (Spain) and fourth (Hungary) in the subsequent outings."

Here are some facts, confirmed by the Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme (FIM) - the global governing body for motorcycle racing - that put Aishwarya's performance in perspective.

■ Aishwarya did finish with most points in the women's category but was the only one who participated in all four rallies.

■ In the Dubai race, which the press statement

says she won, she was the only woman rider.

■ In Portugal, she was third among three woman riders. In Spain, she was fifth among five women participants, and in Hungary, she was fourth among four riders.

The big advantage Aishwarya had over others was that she competed in all four races, which helped her stock more points and eventually finish on top.

An FIM media spokesperson told *The Indian Express* that most other riders, unlike the Bangalore-based Indian two-wheeler star, didn't have much support.

"For most riders, the FIM Bajas World Cup is a question of budget. As most of the riders are not professionals, it is not easy to compete in the whole season as they prefer to attend events in Europe. Aishwarya is part of the TVS team and that is why she was able to attend the four rounds of the World Cup. Other riders are not under contract with a team as they are private riders," the spokesperson said.

Besides, auto giants TVS, Aishwarya is supported by Sidvin, Mountain Dew, Scott Motorsports India, K&N, Cult Sport and BigRock Dirt Park.

Multiple attempts to reach Aishwarya, via TVS Racing, went futile. It was said her media interactions were 'put on hold'.

The FIM confirmed that Aishwarya com-



Aishwarya Pissay (standing centre) competed in all four races, which helped her stock more points and eventually finish on top.

pleted all stages of the rounds but received a time penalty in some of them.

In the three rallies, apart from Dubai where she was the only participant in the women's category, Aishwarya finished between approximately 50 minutes and an hour and 40 minutes behind her nearest competitor, according to information on the FIM website.

In the release, Aishwarya spoke about the challenges of finishing a race. "Without a doubt, the Hungarian Baja was one of my best races though I didn't win. It wasn't an easy race. Given the nature of the terrain, it was more of endurance than just pace. I was riding a smaller bike (250cc) as against the 450cc bikes other girls were on. So, there was always a difference

EXPLAINED

E. Dakar Rally ultimate challenge for motorsport enthusiasts

THE FIM Baja World Cup is a rally-raid championship for two-wheelers and quads, held over asphalt and non-asphalt surfaces, including desert sand and dirt tracks. The rider who takes the least time to complete the stages in a round is ranked No.1 and gets 25 points. For a motorsport enthusiast, the Dakar Rally is the ultimate challenge and championships like the FIM Baja World Cup are one of the stepping stones. Others like the Pan Africa Rally and the Silk Way Rally are where riders and drivers cut their teeth before attempting the ultimate challenge for man/woman and machine. Each of the four rounds of the FIM Baja World Cup is typically held over two days. The rounds are spread across five months. The distance covered during a round is less than that in the Dakar Rally. For example, the timed sections of the Dubai event were about 407 kilometres. The 2019 Dakar Rally was 3,000-km long, held over 10 special stages with 70 per cent of it over sand.

of 20-25 minutes between me and the other riders. However, it was more about finishing the race and I was focused on that. It's an honour to be the first athlete to bring home a World Championship and put India on the Map of International Motorsports."

Last season, Aishwarya competed in the Baja Aragon in Spain. However, she suffered a

crash and had to undergo surgery and months of rehabilitation for a ruptured pancreas.

"It's absolutely overwhelming. I am out of words. After what happened last year, my first international season, when I crashed in Spain Baja and suffered career-threatening injuries, to come out and win the championship, is a great feeling," Aishwarya said in the release.