

Lady trio aims to conquer Himalaya

AGE CORRESPONDENT

If you thought the Raid de Himalaya draws only tough, rugged men with nerves of steel, think again. Delhi's Shuchi Thakur and Chandigarh's Anu Rana and Sarah Kashyap are three ladies who promise to set the race, rated among the top 10 toughest rallies in the world, on fire.

Shuchi and Anu Rana have assiduously been preparing for the 20th edition of this gruelling event, starting on Monday in Leh, that traverses past torturous mountain roads, hairpin curves and dangerous drop-offs at a height of almost 4,900 metres above sea level in Kargil, Zaskar and Ladakh.

"Everything that I do in life is a means to this end - rallying. I am in top form and am confident of putting up a good show once again," Shuchi said.

"I am there to compete, not for a fun drive in the hills," she added.

Shuchi is regarded as one of the world's leading cross-country high-altitude racers among women and she has competed in the raid an astounding 12 times.

Sarah is also an accomplished rider as she was the first Indian woman to



Shuchi Thakur (right) with her navigator.

finish the Xtreme Moto Category at the Raid de Himalaya in 2015. The only other woman biker to finish Raid Xtreme Moto has been the Austrian, Klaudia Honeder, who achieved the feat in 2008.

In the 2017 Desert Storm, she added another feather in her cap by becoming the first Indian woman to complete the race, competing in the Xtreme Moto category.

In the next edition of the same event Sarah Desert Storm 2018, Sarah fin-

ished eighth overall in Xtreme Moto.

The raid will be flagged off from Leh on Monday, and will finish on October 14, after covering approximately 3,000 kilometers.

Anu has no hesitation in saying that the Raid is her favourite motorsport event.

"I love the challenge of driving for long hours at high altitudes. It requires a completely different set of training and conditioning of your body," she said.

motorsport

"The terrain keeps getting steeper with every turn, and you will not know when you will be racing on loose rocks or even sand, which makes the drive tougher with distance. For a racer like me, the terrain looks tempting, but you should never forget the limits of your car," Anu, a seasoned rallyist now after three shots already at the Raid, added.

Shuchi Thakur, who hails from Dharamshala and now lives in Delhi, first competed in the Raid de Himalaya in 2005. She has been racing every year in it since then, except in 2016. This makes Shuchi the only woman in the world to have raced a 4X4 vehicle over one lakh kilometers of high-altitude dangerous roads in an extreme motorsport event.

Shuchi's commendable podium finishes include second in the T1 category at Raid 2017, first in the T2 category at Raid 2015, and second in the T2 category at Raid 2013.

At the Maruti Suzuki National Autocross Championship 2016-17, she ranked first in North zone 4-wheel drive category. Shuchi, as a professional rallyist, believes in the fitness mantra.