

Female driver overtakes competition at Dakar race

Cheered on by her family, driver Fatumata Bah raised her arms in triumph after winning an amateur motor drag race in Dakar that saw four men and four women competing for first place.



Fatumata Bah, 42, a former banker and race driver, who participated in Dakar's first Grand, which she won, holds her trophies during the trophy ceremony in Dakar, Senegal on 25 February 2023. Reuters/Zohra Benserra

Pairs of drivers in small Peugeot hatchbacks had raced to make the best time on a makeshift 300m track at the old airport in the city - part of the capital's first so-called Dakar Grand Prix.

"I beat the boys," the 42-year-old former banker said. "Being a woman or a man doesn't mean anything, this is the 21st century - girl power!"

Inspired by the Paris-Dakar rally, organisers wanted to create an event where women and men could compete on an equal footing, after previously holding an all-female race.

Bah and the other female drivers - one of whom placed third - are keen to challenge gender stereotypes in sometimes socially conservative Senegal and elsewhere.

"I dedicate this trophy to my father and my husband who has always supported me in this passion, which is supposedly reserved for men," the mother-of-three said after the awards ceremony in late February.

Bah started racing 20 years ago after her father encouraged her to share his interest in cars. Her husband, mechanic Cheikh Tidiane Bathily, is also her coach.

"What I feel in these moments is a pride for me, and joy for her, because I know this is something she loves," Bathily, 42, said.

Bah donated her winnings to the SOS Children's Village organisation, where she has worked since quitting banking.

"This cup is to show them that everything is possible in life. With courage and perseverance, you can do it," she said.

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