



BILSTEIN joins Defender Rally as Official Shock Absorber Partner for the World Rally-Raid Championship

BILSTEIN and Defender Rally are partnering to compete in one of the most demanding series in global motorsport: the FIA World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC). As Official Shock Absorber Partner, BILSTEIN becomes an integral component in Defender's works programme – beginning with the legendary Dakar Rally as the 2026 season opener. Two brands, united by the same ambition: high performance under extreme conditions.

A new era begins

With its engagement with Defender Rally, BILSTEIN opens a new chapter in its motorsport history. The five W2RC events lead across deserts, rock fields and punishing stages that tolerate no mistakes – the perfect proving ground for state-of-the-art suspension technology. For BILSTEIN, this environment offers the ideal stage to demonstrate decades of engineering expertise in the toughest competition in the world.

“BILSTEIN is proud to be an active partner of Defender Rally during this extraordinary journey for the brand. Building on our long-standing partnership with Defender in Original Equipment, we bring our damping expertise and decades of engineering excellence to ensure that every detail is designed for ultimate performance under the most demanding and rough conditions. The Dakar Rally marks the beginning of the World Rally-Raid Championship and stands for challenge, innovation and endurance. Values that have defined BILSTEIN as a premium brand for generations,” says Hanno Luczak, Chief Technical Officer, thyssenkrupp Bilstein GmbH.

Defender Dakar D7X-R – Engineering for the extreme

At the heart of the Defender Rally is the Defender Dakar D7X-R, a rally raid variant engineered from the robust and highly capable Defender OCTA platform. Its robust D7x aluminum monocoque architecture, drivetrain, transmission and the 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 form the production-based platform on which the rally-raid model competes in the new W2RC “Stock” category. The use of an advanced sustainable fuel, as defined and compliant with FIA regulations*, further underlines the vehicle's future-oriented motorsport credentials.

At the same time, the D7X-R has been built to meet the extreme demands of the W2RC, incorporating dynamic optimisations and motorsport-specific enhancements that support performance and durability in the world's toughest off-road stages.

For the suspension, the Defender Dakar D7X-R rally car utilises cutting-edge off-road technology from its partner BILSTEIN, specifically further engineered for the unique demands of rally-raid competition. The partnership builds on an existing relationship with Defender, which sees production cars also fitted with BILSTEIN dampers.

BILSTEIN Black Hawk Technology: Engineered to endure

The BILSTEIN Black Hawk shock absorber system is engineered to deliver precise control, stability and durability under extreme and constantly changing conditions. It must perform on the most varied terrain, from deep desert sand to sharp gravel and unforgiving rock. Each surface places different demands on damper length and characteristics. This is exactly where BILSTEIN's Black Hawk technology shows its strengths.

The BILSTEIN logo consists of the word "BILSTEIN" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font on a blue rectangular background. To the right of the text is a yellow square containing a black stylized graphic of a coil spring.

At the core of the system is the patented Zone Control CR architecture with a triple-piston design. This allows for a precisely controlled damping characteristic across the complete range of suspension movement.

A key component is the Jounce Cut-Off system – an integrated hydraulic bump stop that prevents bottoming-out at the end of the compression travel. A dedicated valve stack allows the compression stage to be precisely tuned, ensuring stability and control even during extreme jumps and harsh landings.

Its counterpart is the Rebound Cut-Off system, which manages rebound travel and reliably prevents unwanted top-out events. For fine-tuning across different terrain types, the system features a Dual Speed Compression Adjuster on the reservoir, enabling separate high-speed and low-speed compression adjustments.

The system also uses a larger-diameter external reservoir for efficient heat dissipation, ensuring the damper maintains full performance even under sustained high loads.

Developed and refined in dedicated Defender Rally testing, the BILSTEIN Black Hawk system enhances performance in the most demanding conditions and is engineered to manage the additional, constantly changing mass of the vehicle, including the 550-litre fuel system.

“The BILSTEIN Black Hawk technology represents one of our most advanced, state-of-the-art damper technologies for off-road applications,” says Adam van der Ploeg, Design Engineer BILSTEIN UK. “Every component is engineered for maximum performance strength and precision. Built to perform where other systems reach their limits.”

A world-class Dakar line-up for the W2RC

For the W2RC season opener at the Dakar Rally, Defender presents one of the strongest line-ups in international off-road motorsport. Three top-tier crews will take on more than 80 hours of competitive driving and roughly 5,000 kilometres of timed stages over two weeks.

The teams consist of Dakar legend Stéphane Peterhansel with Mika Metge, Rally-Raid World Champion Rokas Baciūška with Oriol Vidal and off-road specialist Sara Price alongside Sean Berriman. Their extensive experience across the world’s toughest rally events forms the perfect foundation for top-level performance, especially under the extreme conditions of the Dakar Rally.

Dakar: The Everest of Motorsport

The Dakar Rally marks the opening stage of the W2RC and is widely regarded as the toughest test in motorsport. Approximately 5,000 kilometres of timed stages through deserts, rock fields and extreme temperatures make it the ultimate proving ground for technology that must prove itself under real-world pressure. What performs here shapes the innovations of tomorrow.

A strong partnership, built for the future

Through entering the FIA World Rally-Raid Championship, BILSTEIN and Defender deepen their long-standing collaboration. Both brands demonstrate what true technical excellence looks like under extreme, real-world competition. For BILSTEIN, participation in the W2RC is far more than a motorsport entry. It is a clear statement of engineering that proves itself in competition. Precision, performance and reliability: values that have defined BILSTEIN for decades.

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*Complies with FIA regulations - FIA Appendix J, Article 266 - Energy Regulations for Competition Vehicles, Article 3 - Advanced Sustainable Fuel, 3.2 AS Petrol.

Notes to Editors

About BILSTEIN

BILSTEIN is part of thyssenkrupp AG and has its headquarters in Ennepetal, Germany. The company develops and produces suspensions, shock absorbers and springs for cars and vans and is one of the world's largest suppliers with an annual production of around 13 million shock absorbers. BILSTEIN is a technology leader and a global player with more than 4,100 employees at nine locations in six countries – including the UK, the USA, Romania, China and Mexico.

About Defender

Defender embraces the impossible. Each member of the Defender family is purposefully designed, highly desirable and seriously durable. A modern-day hero that respects the past but at the same time anticipates the future. Available in 90, 110 and 130 body styles, with up to eight seats, each has a charisma of its own. As part of our vision of modern luxury by design, Defender 110 is available as an electric hybrid. Defender Hard Top means business, with 90 and 110 body styles for professional capability. The tough luxury Defender OCTA is the master of extreme performance – taking performance and capability to another level on and off-road. A beacon of liberty that can trace its roots back to the first Land Rover in 1948, Defender is a brand that supports humanitarian and conservation work with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Tusk Trust.

The Defender brand is underpinned by Land Rover – a mark of trust built on more than 75 years of expertise in technology and world-leading off-road capability. Defender is designed and engineered in the UK and sold in 121 countries. It belongs to the JLR house of brands alongside Range Rover, Discovery and Jaguar.

Defender Rally

Defender embraces the impossible, and Defender Rally embodies this to the extreme, demonstrating the ultimate capability, reliability and endurance in the most challenging of environments.

In 2025 Defender became the official car partner of the Dakar Rally, the partnership set to continue in 2026, 2027 and 2028. From 2026, Defender will also compete in the FIA World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC), entering the 'Stock' category – this being the first of a three-year programme.

Defender's capability is designed to take on the most challenging of conditions, with Dakar Rally being the ultimate test. The competition car retains the same tough, purpose-engineered D7x body architecture as the Defender, based on a lightweight aluminium monocoque construction to create a stiff body structure, in addition to featuring the 4.4-litre twin turbo V8 engine from Defender OCTA to provide exceptional driveability.

While Defender will not compete in Dakar until 2026, it played a key role at the 2025 rally as the event's official vehicle partner. A fleet of 20 Defenders supported the event, which began in Bisha, Saudi Arabia, and ended in Shubaytah, transporting race officials and VIP media. A



further six highly specialised Defender recce vehicles will be used by Dakar Rally organisers to plan the routes for the 2026, 2027 and 2028 events.

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