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Matthai, Ghosh and Tsering favourites in Raid de Himalaya

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The 20th edition of the iconic Raid de Himalaya gets under way in Leh on Wednesday, with the country's leading rallying lights lining up to battle for the ultimate prize in Indian motorsports.

Rallying titans Phillipos Matthai and Amitrajit Ghosh of Team Mahindra, 2015 Raid winner Lhakpa Tsering and 2017 runner-up Sanjay Razdan and third-placed Sanjay Agarwal are among the over 230 competitors in fray, including 31 teams in the Xtreme cars and trucks category, 37 teams in the Xtreme motorcycles and quads, 12 bikers in the Alpine two-wheeler category, and 31 teams in the Adventure Trail.

They will all be required to show their mettle and fight with each other in the highest reaches of the Himalayas, passing through dangerous roads in the sectors of Kargil, Zaskar and Ladakh. 2015 Raid winner Lhakpa Tsering of Arunachal Pradesh pointed out that it took guts to

race at such heights on such difficult roads. "Rallying is not cricket or tennis where you have 17-18 year olds becoming champions. Competitive high-altitude racing needs maturity, brains and physical fitness, and tremendous grit," the 45-year-old veteran, who has been in motorsports for 20 years, said. "I am really excited and am looking forward to go all out and win another title for our team," multiple-rally and racing champion Amitrajit Ghosh of Team Mahindra said.

The first stage of the Raid will take the competitors on the never-before traversed section from Lamayuru, called the moonland of Ladakh, to Photoksar. They will then hit the newly-upgraded road that was earlier a mule track into Zaskar before crossing the Sirisir La at a height of 4805 meters above sea level. Interestingly, the main contenders have all opted for different vehicles which all require different skill sets. Matthai and Ghosh will be driving in their preferred XUV 500.