



Joaquim Rodrigues, C.S. Santosh make satisfying start for Hero Motosports

Hero Motosports Team Rally riders, Joaquim Rodrigues of Portugal and C.S. Santosh of India, gave a satisfying start to the team's Dakar debut.

Rodrigues, who entered the first timed section in 27th place, made a blazing run to complete the 39-km special in 29 minutes 42 seconds, that put him in 16th place in the provisional general classification—a gain of nine places up the starting order. Most impressively, the Portuguese rider, who is making his Dakar debut, finished one place ahead of the defending champion, Toby Price.



“Today’s stage was good for me, though I started with too much adrenalin. So, I first hit a bump hard and then hit some rocks twice that scared me a little. Then I started to realise that this is my first stage in my first Dakar, so I decided to slow down. After that, it got a little bit better. I am really happy with my bike. Hero Motosports has done a great job with the bike and I am glad that I got to the end,” said Rodrigues at the finish of the stage.

In contrast to Rodrigues's opening blitz, Santosh preferred to make a conservative start, without taking any risks. Starting the stage in 42nd place, he slipped five places down the order after completing the special with a total time of 32 minutes 45 seconds

"Being the first stage of the Dakar, there were some nerves flying and I was pretty nervous at start. In the first couple of kilometres it took some time to understand the kind of stage it's going to be for the next 40 km. There was a lot of water and lots of puddles and a few river crossings. So, it was an interesting stage. I didn't really push because it's the first day at the Dakar and there is a long way to go. Towards the end, it got a little better, but overall I am pretty happy, how I did today and minimised the mistakes. I am already looking forwards to tomorrow's stage," said Santosh after completing his run.

By Dakar standards, the 39-km special was a soft opening of the rally. But the technical track with a mix of trail-type section had plenty of potential to induce errors from the riders. Fortunately, both the riders managed to avoid any complications to set up the second stage nicely.

The second stage that will task the riders with a 803-km run from Resistencia to San Miguel De Tucuman out of which 275 km will be timed section.

Provisional General Classification

1. Xavier De Soultrait, Viltais Racing Team Hfp, Yamaha, 00:28:20
2. Juan Perdo Garcia, Sherco TVS Rally Factory, Sherco-TVS, 00:28:22
3. Ricky Brabec, Monster Energy Honda, Honda, 00:28:34
- 16. Joaquim Rodrigues, Hero Motosports Team Rally, Hero Speedbrain, 00:29:42**
- 47. C.S. Santosh, Hero Motosports Team Rally, Hero Speedbrain, 00:32:45**

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