

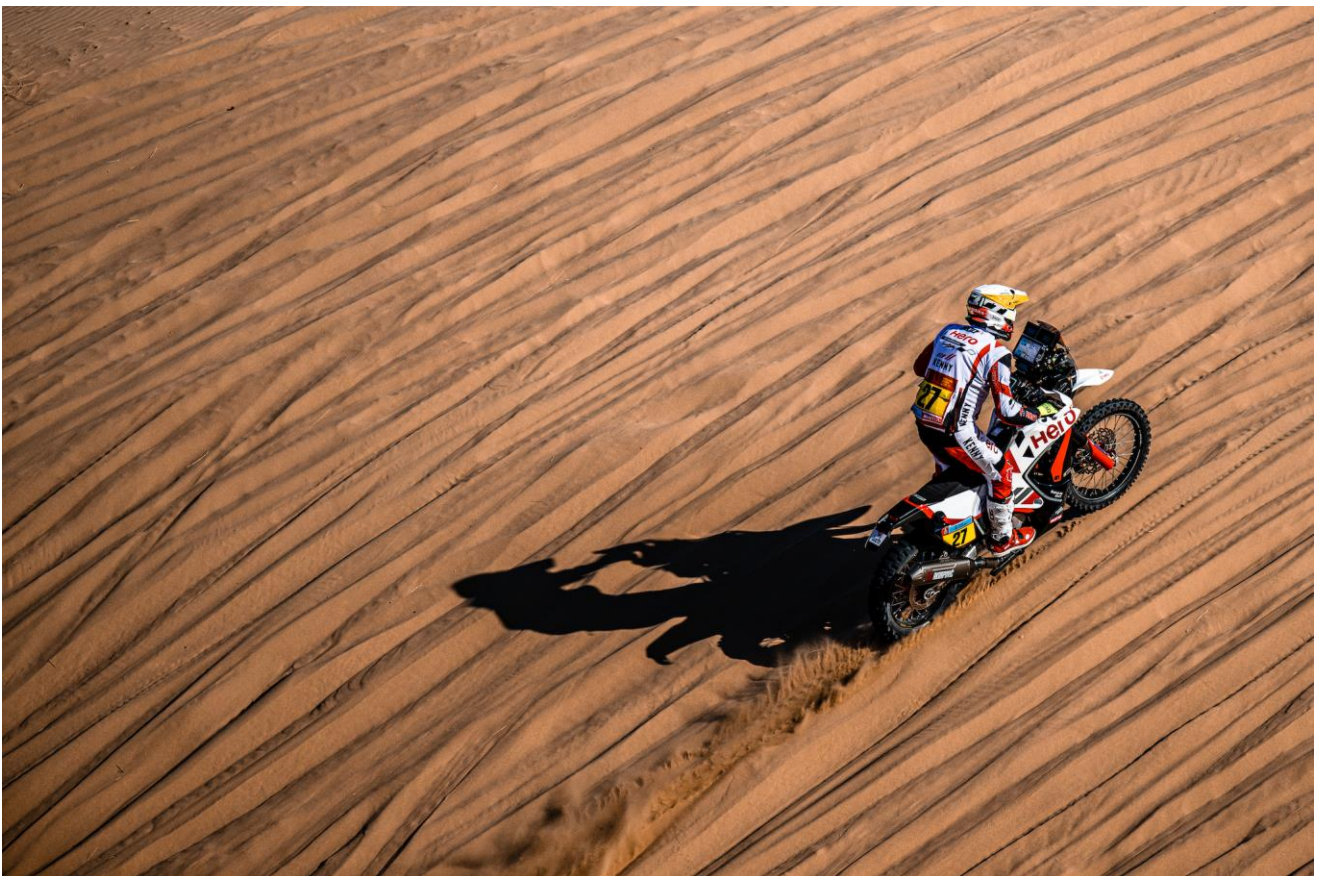


## **HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY BEGINS ITS SIXTH CONSECUTIVE DAKAR RALLY**

**Ha'il, Saudi Arabia, January 02, 2022**

**Hero MotoSports Team Rally**, the motorsports team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has begun its campaign at the 44<sup>th</sup> edition of the Dakar Rally in Ha'il, Saudi Arabia.

Participating in its sixth consecutive Dakar Rally - arguably the toughest race on the planet - Hero MotoSports Team Rally is represented by a two-rider team – experienced and in-form Joaquim Rodrigues and young gun Aaron Maré, who is replacing the injured Franco Caimi for the Rally.



The Team started their campaign on January 1 with a 19 km long Qualifying stage (earlier known as Prologue). Joaquim Rodrigues finished at the 11th position and Aaron Maré at the 16th position in the Rally GP class.

This edition of the Dakar Rally also marks the beginning of the newly announced FIA and FIM World Rally-raid Championships for cross-country rallying. Nicknamed #W2RC, the championship kicks off with the crown jewel Dakar, and aims to establish a calendar for the year that includes the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge in March, Rally Kazakhstan in April, Andalucía Rally in June, and ends with the Rallye Du Maroc in October 2022.

This new consolidation of top rallies is being considered a historic move, one which offers better regulations and solutions for the sustainable, long-term development of the Rally-Raid discipline, participating teams, manufacturers and riders.

The competitors in motorcycle category are subdivided into multiple classes as per the new championship format for #W2RC. The Hero MotoSports riders are participating in the premier class, named Rally GP, which comprises the top 27 riders in the championship. The other classes are Rally2, Rally3 and the Originals.

The short Qualifying stage, set in the middle of a long liaison between Jeddah and Ha'il, gave the top 15 finishers in the Rally GP Class an opportunity to choose their starting positions for the first stage on January 2.

With the administrative & technical scrutiny and the Covid-19 tests completed already, the participants rolled-off from the ceremonial podium at Ha'il on January 1, marking the official beginning of their Dakar 2022 campaign.

The first stage of the Dakar Rally will take the riders on a 513 km loop around Ha'il, with a 333 km long special. Here, the riders will get their first taste of the treacherous terrain, typical of the deserts of Saudi Arabia.



### **Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:**

“The Dakar 2022 is not only the start of the new racing season but also of a new powerful World Championship which pushes the rally sport to a new level in many aspects. After a busy season participating in many races, we have put in consistent efforts to bring our riders and machines up to the next level of competitiveness and we look forward to proving this growth over the next two weeks.

JRod, the ever-constant in our team since the start in 2016, is well prepared for the Dakar. Franco and Sebastian, after having shown very promising results throughout 2021 unfortunately met with injuries that they have not recuperated from in time for the Dakar. CS Santosh is also still recovering from his crash at the previous Dakar.

In Aaron Maré we are happy to have a strong last-minute replacement. I am sure that he will deliver his best along with Joaquim to keep the Hero MotoSports flag flying high. We are grateful to be able to show our competence in this fascinating competition even during these difficult times. Greetings and best wishes for the New Year to all our fans around the world!”

**Joaquim Rodrigues, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:** *“The qualifying stage today was not as easy as I expected. I started the stage strong, though the arm-pump made it difficult for me to maintain a good hold on the bike. Anyhow, I rode safe, aiming to bring the bike back to the finish line. Yet, I am happy that we finished in a good position. This was only the qualifying stage; we have a long way to go.”*

**Aaron Maré, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:** *“Due to the reverse starting order today, I entered the race much later than the other competitors. I had a rough day, with the track being quite torn up and rocky. I took it easy and hoped to make it just outside the top 15 so that I have a better starting position tomorrow. I’m happy with the day.”*

### **Provisional Rankings – Qualifying Stage (Rally GP Class)**

1.	Daniel Sanders	Gas Gas Factory Team	11m 06s
2.	Pablo Quintanilla	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 12s
3.	Ross Branch	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 23s
4.	Kevin Benavides	Red Bull KTM Factory Team	+ 24s
11.	<b>Joaquim Rodrigues</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 37s
16.	<b>Aaron Maré</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 01m 18s

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