



Al Dhannah City, February 26, 2024

## HERO MOTOSPORTS MARKS A SOLID START TO THE ABU DHABI DESERT CHALLENGE 2024

### ROSS BRANCH WINS THE PROLOGUE STAGE

**Hero MotoSports Team Rally**, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, started its campaign at the second round of the World Rally-Raid Championship 2024 - the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (ADDC), with a two-rider line-up.

Following a historic Dakar Rally outing in January this year – becoming the only Indian manufacturer team to ever make it to the final podium - the team is back to the Arabian deserts, eager to continue their high performance streak.



At Abu Dhabi, the team is represented by factory rider Ross Branch, and Aaron Maré who joins the Hero camp temporarily for this race. A confident Ross emerged the winner of the Prologue stage, whereas Aaron finished closely behind him in the 4th place. The duo is keen on keeping the momentum high all through the week.



After successfully completing the administrative checks and technical scrutiny on February 25th (Sunday), the competitors took to the start line for the Prologue on Monday - a fast 5 km sand track near Al Dannah city. The track was short and fast, setting the context for a fiery battle that will last for a week in the Arabian desert.

Just a month since the Dakar Rally, the 33rd edition of the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge will double as the second round of the FIA-FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) for the third consecutive time. The prologue will be followed by 5 stages, for a total of 1,902 kilometres of racing including 1,179 kilometres of timed specials. 91 vehicles made it after scrutineering to the ceremonial start at Al Dhannah, in the west of the country. After camping two nights here, the caravan will set up camp in the historic southern town of Mezaira'a, a gateway to Rub' Al Khali Desert. It is also an important leaf in ADDC history, as the race returns to this celebrated township and the Liwa Oasis after 22 long years.

Fresh from his great Dakar exploits, Ross Branch is hopeful of a good result at the ADDC 2024. Notably, he finished the last edition in the 5th place, just 1-minute shy from the podium. His teammates are still recovering from injuries from the Dakar, and Aaron Maré found success in making it to the Hero team as a last minute replacement for Sebastian Buhler. Aaron, a resident of Dubai had earlier represented Hero MotoSports at the Dakar in 2022 where he rode alongside Joaquim Rodrigues and finished with an impressive 15th position.



The first official stage of the ADDC 2024 is due on Tuesday, February 27th, and this will take the riders on a 248 km special in the sands of the Al Dhafra region. Known for its 100% sand conditions, the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge will take the riders on different routes across the majestic dunes of the Liwa desert until Saturday.



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

*"After a very short break since our phenomenal Dakar podium, the team is back with Ross to continue our attack at the World Championship. He has already started the ADDC in great style by winning the prologue. Unfortunately, his team mates are still recovering from Dakar incidents, so it is a pleasure to welcome back Aaron Maré in the team. I'm confident he will be a good support towards our efforts for yet another significant team result. Aaron was already with us at Dakar 2022 as a last-minute support, and did a great job at it - so it was an easy decision to get him back, as he even lives and trains in Dubai.*

*JRod is also here on my side at ADDC while still recovering from his Dakar crash. He is supporting the team, and is keenly experiencing the many elements of a Rally from a perspective other than behind the handlebar."*

**Ross Branch:**

*"Prologue done here at ADDC, and it was great fun to be on this exciting track. My Hero 450 is going amazing, and it feels good to be back on the bike and with the team after a short break since the Dakar. I feel good, and I'm looking forward to a great week ahead in the sand!"*

**Aaron Maré:**

*"The Prologue went pretty well today. I made a small mistake halfway through, and lost a bit of time, but was still able to make it to the 4th place. It should be a good start position for tomorrow, and I hope it will be a good Stage 1. I am thankful to Hero MotoSports for this opportunity, and I am confident that Ross and I can put up a great fight here this week."*

**Provisional Rankings – Prologue Stage**

1.	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>3m 04s</b>
2.	Michael Docherty	SRG Motorsports	+ 2s
3.	Tobias Ebster	SRG Motorsports	+ 7s
4.	<b>Aaron Maré</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 8s</b>
5.	Konrad Dabrowski	Duust Rally Team	+ 10s

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**For more information:**

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