



Grândola, April 03, 2024

HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY REGISTERS A STRONG START TO RALLY RAID PORTUGAL 2024

Back from a solid victory at their last outing in Abu Dhabi, **Hero MotoSports Team Rally**, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has kicked off the third round of the FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) 2024 - the BP Ultimate Rally Raid Portugal 2024, fielding a two-rider line-up. Team Hero MotoSports - the current leaders of the W2RC in both the rider and manufacturer categories - is excited about their return to a race in Portugal since their last one in 2020.

Factory riders Sebastian Buhler and Ross Branch represent Hero in Portugal. Starting the race on a positive note, Buhler finished Stage 1 in the 6th place, with Branch closing in right behind him in the 7th position - both competing in the premier Rally GP Class. A short Prologue was held earlier in the same day (April 3rd, Wednesday), in which Ross and Buhler claimed the 3rd and 4th places respectively in the Rally GP Class.



Prologue today was a short and tight 4 km long special that resembled a motocross race, and gave the competitors a strong first taste of the terrain and rhythm of the rally. Starting again in a few hours, the 170 km Stage 1 - of which 100 km were timed – took the competitors to a long sandy stretch, and later through hard, tree-lined narrow tracks. The special was tightly contested, with most of the competitors trying to understand the new terrain, while also trying to maintain a fast rhythm.



Ross Branch who leads the W2RC 2024 leaderboard with 50 points - thanks to his solid 2nd place finishes at both the Dakar and ADDC - is here on a mission to defend his lead. Even though the terrain is different from what he is accustomed to, the 'Kalahari Ferrari' assumes the complexities will be similar for most competitors.

For Sebastian Buhler, it is a sweet return to racing after his unfortunate crash at the Dakar. Even though German by birth, Buhler has spent most of his life in Portugal, and that too, just 30 km away from Grândola. The three-time winner of the Baja Portalegre 500 knows the terrain well, and expects an edge over his opponents.

This is the inaugural edition of the BP Ultimate Rally Raid Portugal, the organizers of which are also the masterminds behind the popular Rally de Portugal and Baja Portalegre 500. With the rally being inducted into the World Rally Raid Championship, Portugal has become only the 7th nation to welcome the W2RC, since its inception in 2022.

Based in the town of Grândola, 60 kilometres from Lisbon, this 5-day rally will explore the Alentejo and Ribatejo areas, and also make a foray into the Spanish Extremadura – thereby making the Rally Raid Portugal the 'first cross-border race in the W2RC'. Spanning a total of 1,735 km with 1,039 km of specials, the week will see a mix of everything – sand, mountains, clay, stone, fast sections, winding tracks, and technical stretches – all set amidst vibrant Mediterranean landscapes that replace the desert terrains found in other W2RC races. The rains all through the last week has added mud also to the mix – increasing the complexities.



However, unlike the desert races, this race is attracting quite a lot of spectators, who are crowding up to cheer for the competitors, and filming them eagerly all along the routes. 148 competitors from over 30 nationalities have made it to the start line of the inaugural edition of the Rally Raid Portugal.

Stage 2 on Thursday (April 4th) will be a 228 km route that starts and finishes in Grândola. 193 km of this is timed, and will continue in sandy sections, but with a slightly more consistent surface than the first Stage.

Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"We're happy to be back in Portugal for the 3rd round of the W2RC. It started off very condensed with both Prologue and the first Stage on the same day. We've had very limited preparation here before the race owing to the ill weather in the last week. The terrain is very different from most of our other races - less navigation, but a lot of tricky stages in front of us. But we're happy that Buhler can take the advantages in his home race. For Ross, his main goal will be to defend his lead position at the championship.

It's also great to have JRod with us starting his new direction in career as Sportive Manager for the team, right here in his home country. In his new role, he is supporting the riders in their preparations and training."

Ross Branch:

"It was quite an interesting day today. Prologue was much fun today morning on the bike - it felt almost like a motocross race. Stage 1 was also good and enjoyable, but it's really tight here, and a lot different than what we're used to. I made a small mistake 15 kms before the finish and had a crash. But overall, we're back in one piece, and looking forward to enjoying the rest of the week."

Sebastian Buhler:

"The first day is done and dusted. It was quite short, but long as well because the terrain is quite tricky here. There was not so much of navigation, but the riding was tricky and the rhythm was high. But I'm happy with how it went, and I'm sure it will be a great week of racing ahead."

Provisional Rankings – Prologue Stage (Rally GP Class)

| | | | |
|----|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Tosha Schareina | Monster Energy Honda Team | 3m 29s |
| 2. | Adrien Van Beveren | Monster Energy Honda Team | + 02s |
| 3. | Ross Branch | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 08s |
| 4. | Sebastian Buhler | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 09s |
| 5. | Pablo Quintanilla | Monster Energy Honda Team | + 11s |

Provisional Rankings – Stage 1 (Rally GP Class)

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|----|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Tosha Schareina | Monster Energy Honda Team | 1h 12m 15s |
| 2. | Lorenzo Santolino | Sherco TVS Rally Factory | + 4m 02s |
| 3. | Skyler Howes | Monster Energy Honda Team | + 4m 13s |
| 6. | Sebastian Buhler | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 5m 35s |
| 7. | Ross Branch | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 5m 58s |

Provisional Overall Standings after Stage 1 (Rally GP Class)

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|----|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Tosha Schareina | Monster Energy Honda Team | 1h 15m 44s |
| 2. | Lorenzo Santolino | Sherco TVS Rally Factory | + 4m 15s |
| 3. | Skyler Howes | Monster Energy Honda Team | + 4m 27s |
| 6. | Sebastian Buhler | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 5m 44s |
| 7. | Ross Branch | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 6m 06s |

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