



Press Release

**Sea Camp, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, January 01, 2023**

## **HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY DELIVERS A SOLID FIRST STAGE AT THE DAKAR RALLY 2023**

**Hero MotoSports Team Rally**, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, completed the first of fourteen stages at Dakar 2023, with three of its riders finishing in the top 15 positions.

After a steady start in the prologue stage, the riders set out on their first stage at the 45<sup>th</sup> Dakar edition – a 603km loop around the Sea Camp, near Yanbu. All four riders finished the stage and reached the bivouac, with Ross Branch and Sebastian Buhler securing the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> spots respectively. Franco Caimi finished 17<sup>th</sup>, followed by Joaquim Rodrigues at the 20<sup>th</sup> position in the Rally GP Class.



The competitors found this first taste of the desert quite tricky, with the stony sections sending several of them to crashes. Ross Branch suffered a couple of unfortunate crashes through the stage, owing to which the Botswanan lost time. However, his firm comeback towards the end of the stage placed him at the 12<sup>th</sup> place in the overall rankings.

Right behind Ross in the overall rankings in the 13<sup>th</sup> place is Sebastian Buhler, whose solid run today marked his triumphant return to the Dakar after a gap year.

For Joaquim Rodrigues, the first stage was not the best, yet, his steady ride to the finish found him a top-20 place in the overall leaderboard at the 18<sup>th</sup> position. Franco too was slowed down by the rocks and gravel in the stage. He was however, able to pick up momentum towards the end of the stage, and today's finish placed him at the 19<sup>th</sup> rank in the overall Rally GP class table.

Moving on from the Sea Camp, the competitors will now make their journey inwards to Al'Ula, covering 589kms, of which 430kms is timed. The route has a major share of closed tracks that demand top handling skills, but also promises a visual treat of beautiful landscapes and splendid canyons towards the finish line.



**Joaquim Rodrigues:**

*"Today was not the best, to be honest. I did not feel comfortable all day. The stage was quite tricky and a lot of competitors crashed through the course. It's only the first day; I'm happy to*

*finish, and look forward to the next stage. I also hope Sam (Sunderland) is okay, and hope to see him again at the next races."*

**Ross Branch:**

*"It was a beautiful stage, was really nice to ride. But it wasn't my best day. I made a mistake early on in the stage and suffered a crash. Again, after refueling I jumped off a broken dune and hit my face on the navigation tower. Thankfully, we're back at the bivouac in one piece, and I'm looking forward to tomorrow."*

**Sebastian Buhler:**

*"I'm happy with my performance today at the first stage of Dakar 2023. I felt quite good riding in the stage, and we just rolled on, trying to avoid mistakes. The result today is great, and I hope to continue this momentum till the end."*

**Franco Caimi:**

*"It was a tricky first day for me at the Dakar. I made a small navigation error in the beginning that cost me some minutes. After on, it became quite difficult to ride the bike on the rocks. We had set the suspension expecting fast and sandy terrains, and hence the rocks and gravel posed some difficulty. Anyhow, I felt much better towards the end of the stage. We'll hopefully gain a better rhythm, which I can then keep building throughout the race."*

**Provisional Rankings – Stage 1 (Rally GP Class)**

1.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda Team	03h 31m 00s
2.	Kevin Benavides	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	+ 44s
3.	Mason Klein	BAS World KTM Racing Team	+ 44s
13.	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 8m 52s
14.	<b>Sebastian Buhler</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 8m 54s
17.	<b>Franco Caimi</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 12m 26s
20.	<b>Joaquim Rodrigues</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 13m 30s

**Provisional Overall Rankings – at the end of Stage 1 (Rally GP Class)**

1.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda Team	04h 14m 10s
2.	Kevin Benavides	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	+ 19s
3.	Toby Price	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	+ 39s
12.	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 8m 27s
13.	<b>Sebastian Buhler</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 8m 39s
18.	<b>Joaquim Rodrigues</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 13m 10s
19.	<b>Franco Caimi</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	+ 13m 16s

**For more information:**

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