



Yanbu, Saudi Arabia | 03 January 2026

HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY OFF TO A STRONG START AT DAKAR RALLY 2026

ROSS BRANCH FINISHES PROLOGUE IN FIFTH PLACE

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has officially launched its campaign at the 48th edition of the Dakar Rally. Marking a decade of defiance, this becomes the team's tenth successive appearance at the world's most prestigious rally event. Having successfully completed the short, yet demanding 22 km Prologue stage with a strong overall showing, their Dakar 2026 journey has kicked-off with much confidence and momentum.

Competing with a formidable line-up comprising of Ross Branch, Nacho Cornejo and Tobias Ebster, the team is in great form, ready to deliver a solid campaign. While Ross and Nacho feature in the elite Rally GP class, Tobias arrives at Dakar as a strong contender in the Rally2 category.



Ross Branch set the tone high at Prologue with an impressive 5th place finish, followed by Tobias Ebster in 11th place, and Nacho Cornejo in the 20th position. Runner-up of the 2025 Rally2 World Cup, Tobias is also 2nd in the Rally2 category at the Dakar Prologue stage.



Following administrative and technical scrutineering, 317 vehicles took the start line of Dakar 2026, featuring 564 competitors from 49 nationalities. The motorcycle category includes 115 riders, among them 15 elite Rally GP competitors and 100 Rally2 entrants, highlighting the depth and competitiveness of this year's field.

Kicking off today with the Prologue stage, Dakar Rally 2026 features a new route spanning 13 stages and 8,000+ kilometres that span from the Red sea coast to the vast Arabian desert. Nearly 5,000 kilometres will be timed, making it one of the longest and most demanding Dakars in recent years.

Starting in Yanbu, the Rally will traverse in the heart of Saudi Arabia through Riyadh, and will return to Yanbu for the finish after 2 weeks. The program features two marathon stages, one in each week, where competitors will camp in the desert overnight without any external mechanical assistance. As with every edition since 2020, Dakar 2026 will run entirely within Saudi Arabia, making the Kingdom the sole host of the Dakar Rally for the seventh consecutive year.

While the Rally does not enter the Empty Quarter this year, competitors can expect no respite from the sand. The second week will present particularly demanding dune sections around Wadi Al Dawasir, ensuring a relentless test of endurance, navigation, and resilience.

In the first 'real' stage on Sunday, competitors will challenge each other on a 518 km loop around Yanbu, of which 305 km will be timed. The special stage presents a contrasting mix of terrains – rocky hard-packs, fast sandy sections, and a sprinkle of dunes. The rally caravan will be at the Yanbu bivouac until 05th January.



Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"We are fresh off the start of Dakar 2026, and the prologue was a good opener. The 22 kilometres helped us get into rhythm, and secure our start positions for the first major stage. Everything worked well and the feeling on the bike was positive. Tomorrow's 305-kilometre stage around Yanbu will be the real beginning of the rally as we head further into Saudi Arabia. It is a long two weeks ahead, but we're motivated and ready to give it our all. I extend my thanks to all our partners, sponsors, and fans for your continued support and belief in our team."

Ross Branch, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"The Prologue is done and it was an amazing way to kick things off. The bike felt incredible and I really enjoyed being back out there. It was fast and open, with not much navigation - which was perfect to shake off the cobwebs and get into rhythm. I'm really looking forward to the next two weeks of racing - the real battle begins tomorrow, and I'm excited for what lies ahead. Thank you to everyone for the incredible support."

Tobias Ebster, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"The Dakar has officially begun, and while the Prologue is now behind us, there is still a very long journey ahead - many days and many kilometres to come. The objective is clear: to fight at the front and be in the podium battle. That is what we are here for, and we will give everything for Hero MotoSports. Overall, it was a good Prologue for me. I had a small crash, but nothing serious. I was able to finish strong and secure a top result in Rally2, which is encouraging. Now it's time to really get the rally started."

Nacho Cornejo, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"The Prologue is complete. It was not exactly how we planned to start, but we still have a decent position going into Stage 1. The real Dakar begins tomorrow, so the focus now is to rest, reset, and be fully ready to give it our best. Thank you to everyone who continues to support us - it sure means a lot."

Provisional Classification - Prologue (Overall):

1. Edgar Canet	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	11m 31s
2. Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Racing Team	+ 00m 03s
3. Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 05s
5. Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 00m 16s
11. Tobias Ebster	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 00m 45s
20. Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 01m 05s

Provisional Rankings - Prologue (Rally2):

1. Michael Docherty	BAS World KTM Team	11m 50s
2. Tobias Ebster	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 00m 26s
3. Konrad Dabrowski	Duust Rally Team	+ 00m 26s

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