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HERO MOTOSPORTS NAVIGATES A TOUGH STAGE 12 AS DAKAR RALLY 2026 HEADS INTO ITS GRAND FINALE

CORNEJO AND BRANCH EYE ON OVERALL TOP-10 RANKINGS

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, successfully completed Stage 12 of the Dakar 2026 as the rally edges closer to its grand finale. Ross Branch of Botswana finished the stage in eighth position once again, while Chile's Nacho Cornejo crossed the line in 14th. Following the completion of Stage 12, both riders continue to hold strong overall positions inside the top-10, with Cornejo placed seventh overall and Branch close behind in eighth.



Ross Branch faced a demanding penultimate test on Stage 12, where the technical nature of the route made it difficult to establish an early rhythm. Despite pushing to improve his pace as the stage progressed, conditions did not allow him to perform at his usual level. Branch managed the day with focus and composure, bringing the bike safely to the finish as attention now turns to the final stage of the rally.



Nacho Cornejo also encountered a challenging day, with the technical terrain and a difficult opening preventing him from settling into his usual flow. After a consistent run over the previous stages, the penultimate test required a more measured approach. Cornejo focused on managing the conditions and completing the stage cleanly, keeping his sights firmly set on pushing through the final stage.

Stage 12 proved to be one of the most demanding tests of this year's rally, with highly technical sections offering limited opportunities to build momentum. Despite efforts to find a consistent rhythm early on, the challenging conditions made it difficult to maintain the desired pace throughout. With the penultimate stage now complete, the focus shifts to a controlled and determined approach as the rally heads into its final day, with the aim of bringing the bike home cleanly and finishing on a positive note.

Looking ahead to the final stage of Dakar 2026, the special stage is divided into two distinct sections. Competitors will first tackle a mountainous landscape on gravel tracks, where precise riding and careful cornering will be crucial. Following a transfer to the coast, a new start will signal the beginning of the final timed section of the rally. The event will conclude with the finish line located in the heart of the Yanbu bivouac, bringing the 48th edition of the Dakar Rally to a close. The final test of the rally will offer a total of 138 kilometre, of which 105 kilometre will be timed.



Ross Branch, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"Stage 12 was a really tough one out there today. It was very technical and quite hard to get into a rhythm early on. I didn't ride as well as I would have liked in the morning and struggled to find a strong pace, which meant I gradually slipped back through the stage. That said, we're through it now and there's still one more stage to go. The focus is on finishing strong and giving it everything tomorrow."

Nacho Cornejo, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"Stage 12 was a tough day for me. I didn't feel as comfortable on the bike as I had over the last few days, and I struggled to find a good rhythm early on. It was very technical, and I couldn't get the pace going the way I wanted, which meant I slowly started slipping back. It wasn't my best day out there, but that's part of rally racing. We've reached the end of the penultimate stage, and now the focus is on giving it one last push tomorrow and taking it all the way to the finish."

Provisional Classification - Stage 12:

1.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda HRC	03h 19m 01s
2.	Luciano Benavides	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	+ 03m 43s
3.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 12m 58s
8.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 22m 42s
14.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 29m 38s

Provisional Classification after Stage 12 (Overall):

1.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda HRC	48h 08m 12s
2.	Luciano Benavides	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	+ 03m 20s
3.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 27m 51s
7.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 01h 40m 05s
8.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 02h 48m 15s

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