



AlUla, Saudi Arabia | 06 January 2026

MIXED RESULTS IN STAGE 03 FOR HERO MOTOSPORTS AT DAKAR 2026

BRANCH, CORNEJO STAY FIRM IN OVERALL TOP-10; EBSTER OUT

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has successfully completed the third special stage of the Dakar Rally 2026, enduring a demanding day in the desert with mixed outcomes.

Competing in the premier Rally GP category, Nacho Cornejo and Ross Branch continued their run of consistent performances, crossing the finish line with the 6th and 7th fastest times respectively. After the completion of Stage 03, Branch holds a strong 7th position in the overall general classification, while Cornejo sits close behind in 8th place overall. The day, however, ended early for Tobias Ebster. The Austrian rider suffered an unfortunate crash and was forced to retire, bringing his Dakar campaign to a halt.



Ross Branch began Stage 03 feeling confident and comfortable on the bike, enjoying the flowing nature of the opening section. As the stage progressed and the terrain tightened after the refuelling zone, a few small mistakes cost him valuable time. Despite this, the Botswanan rider brought the bike home safely and remains focused on maintaining momentum as the rally continues.



Nacho Cornejo showed impressive pace early in the stage and briefly took control of the special. At the 41 km checkpoint, the Chilean rider moved into the lead, holding an advantage of 22 seconds over his closest competitor. This marked the first time a Hero MotoSports rider led a Stage in this year's rally. Cornejo maintained his lead until around the 80 km mark, before a heavy fall around 140 kms caused him to lose time and drop down in the order. After being forced to change the tablet on his bike, the Chilean managed to recover some of the lost time and closed Stage 03 with a strong finish. Despite the setback, Cornejo reached the finish line safe in good time, demonstrating his strong determination under challenging conditions.

Tobias Ebster's Stage 03 came to an abrupt end following a crash just 14 kilometres into the special. The Austrian rider lost control of the front end in a left-hand turn, and the bike landed on his hand. He was soon evacuated in a safety helicopter to the bivouac for medical checks, where examinations confirmed a fracture to his scaphoid bone. As a result, Ebster will not be able to resume the race and will fly back to undergo surgery at the earliest.

Stage 03 took competitors into the stunning landscapes of AlUla, covering a total distance of 736 kilometres, including a demanding 421-kilometre timed special. The route combined sandy tracks, rocky sections, and narrow canyons, making navigation particularly challenging throughout the day. As the stage progressed, competitors faced open plateaus where tracks were difficult to spot, with wind and recent rain further adding to the complexity.

Looking ahead to Stage 04, competitors will enter the first leg of the marathon stage on Wednesday, where no outside assistance is permitted. Riders will need to manage their machines carefully, relying only on mutual assistance from fellow competitors. The overnight camp will be basic, with minimal facilities, adding emphasis on strategy, mechanical sympathy, and rider endurance. The first leg of the marathon stage will see competitors cover a total of 526 kilometres, of which 417 kilometres will be against the clock.



Nacho Cornejo, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"Stage 03 was going really well. I felt comfortable and fast on the bike from the start. I had a big crash around kilometre 140, and the bike took most of the impact. I was a bit sore but got going again quickly. Even with the crash, it was a good day. It could have been much worse, so I'm thankful. We made it to the finish and we're ready to keep fighting. Thanks to everyone for the support."

Ross Branch, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"That's the end of Stage 03, and it was definitely not my best day at Dakar. The morning section was nice and flowing, and I was really enjoying the ride. After the refuel, though, the stage became tight and technical, and I made a few mistakes that cost me some time. Still, I'm back in one piece and fully focused on the stages ahead."

Tobias Ebster, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"At kilometre 14 of Stage 03, I lost the front in a left-hand turn and the bike landed on my hand, which broke my scaphoid. I knew straight away something was wrong because I couldn't lift the bike. I was taken back to the bivouac by medical helicopter. This is not the result we were hoping for, but the next step is to get home, have surgery, and start the recovery process. Thank you for all the messages and support — we will come back stronger."

Provisional Classification - Stage 03 (Overall):

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Tosha Scharena | Monster Energy Honda HRC | 04h 26m 39s |
| 2. | Ricky Brabec | Monster Energy Honda HRC | + 02m 17s |
| 3. | Daniel Sanders | Redbull KTM Racing Team | + 03m 28s |
| 6. | Nacho Cornejo | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 09m 52s |
| 7. | Ross Branch | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 10m 38s |
| DNF | Tobias Ebster | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | -- |

Provisional Classification after Stage 03 (Overall):

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Daniel Sanders | Redbull KTM Factory Racing | 12h 12m 31s |
| 2. | Edgar Canet | Monster Energy Honda HRC | + 01m 07s |
| 3. | Tosha Scharena | Monster Energy Honda HRC | + 01m 13s |
| 7. | Ross Branch | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 14m 56s |
| 8. | Nacho Cornejo | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | + 20m 01s |
| DNF | Tobias Ebster | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | -- |

Provisional Classification -Stage 03 - Rally2:

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. | Michael Docherty | BAS World KTM Team | 04h 39m 33s |
| 2. | Martim Ventura | Monster Energy Honda HRC | + 03m 13s |
| 3. | Preston Campbell | Monster Energy Honda HRC | + 06m 57s |
| DNF | Tobias Ebster | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | -- |

Provisional Classification after Stage 03 - Rally2:

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. | Michael Docherty | BAS World KTM Team | 12h 35m 57s |
| 2. | Martim Ventura | Monster Energy Honda HRC | + 03m 32s |
| 3. | Preston Campbell | Monster Energy Honda HRC | + 27m 34s |
| DNF | Tobias Ebster | Hero MotoSports Team Rally | -- |

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