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## HERO MOTOSPORTS CARRIES STRONG MOMENTUM INTO FIRST MARATHON STAGE AT DAKAR 2026

### BRANCH SECURES 4TH PLACE IN STAGE 04

**Hero MotoSports Team Rally**, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has successfully completed the fourth special stage of the Dakar 2026 with an impressive performance as the rally entered its first marathon stage on Wednesday.

Competing in the premier Rally GP category, Ross Branch delivered an outstanding ride, finishing the stage with the 4th fastest time. His teammate, Nacho Cornejo, followed closely with a solid 6th place finish. After the completion of Stage 04, Branch has climbed to 6th position in the overall general classification. Cornejo continues to hold a strong 8th place overall, keeping both Hero MotoSports riders firmly inside the overall top-10.



Branch showed remarkable pace right from the start of the stage. At the 136 km checkpoint, the “Kalahari Ferrari” was just 18 seconds behind the stage leader. He continued to fight at the front for most of the day, staying within half a minute of the lead until the 324 km mark. At the final time check, Branch was only 27 seconds off the lead and went on to finish the stage just 16 seconds behind the stage winner.



For a large part of the day, Branch rode alongside teammate Nacho Cornejo. The two riders worked together through the demanding stage, supporting each other with navigation and maintaining a strong rhythm. Branch managed the stage smartly, faced only a minor tyre issue, and brought the bike back safely as the focus now shifts to the second part of the marathon stage.

Cornejo started Stage 04 while dealing with soreness from a crash the previous day, which made the opening kilometres difficult. As the stage progressed, and especially after the refuelling zone, he began to feel more comfortable and regained his pace. He finished the day satisfied with his performance and the condition of the bike heading into the next stage.

Stage 04 marked the first of two days of the new “Marathon Refuge” stage, introduced for the first time at Dakar 2026. The format follows classic marathon rules, where riders must manage without their service crews. Competitors are provided only basic essentials such as food rations, water, a tent, a mattress, and a sleeping bag. Any repairs must be carried out by the riders themselves, with limited help allowed only from fellow competitors.

Unlike the earlier 48-hour chrono format, where two days were combined into one result, the Marathon Refuge consists of two separate stages, each with its own classification. The first leg saw competitors cover a total distance of 526 kilometres, including 417 kilometres against the clock.

Looking forward to Stage 05 on Thursday, the second leg of the Marathon Refuge stage will bring frequent changes of direction and challenging navigation. Several rocky sections will demand careful riding, where losing a few seconds can turn out better than risking heavy time losses for a mistake. The stage will cover a total 414 kilometres, with 356 kilometres timed.



#### **Ross Branch, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:**

*"That's the end of Stage 04, and honestly, I had an amazing day out there. I really enjoyed every moment. I rode for most of the stage with Nacho, which worked out perfectly — whenever I was unsure or slightly off, he helped guide us back on the right track. The bike felt good overall, just a small tyre issue but nothing major. I'm happy to be here and we'll take it kilometre by kilometre tomorrow and see how it goes."*

#### **Nacho Cornejo, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:**

*"Today's stage went quite smoothly overall. I started the day feeling sore and in some pain from yesterday's crash, so the beginning was tough and it was hard to maintain the pace. Then Ross passed me and we rode together for most of the day, which really helped me get my speed back. After refuelling, I felt much better. I'm happy with how the day went, the bike arrived in very good condition, and we're ready for the second part of the marathon tomorrow."*

### Provisional Classification - Stage 04 (Overall):

1.	Tosha Scharena	Monster Energy Honda HRC	04h 31m 56s
2.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 06s
3.	Skyler Howes	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 10s
4.	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 00m 16s</b>
6.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 03m 13s

### Provisional Classification after Stage 04 (Overall):

1.	Tosha Scharena	Monster Energy Honda HRC	16h 45m 40s
2.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 00s
3.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	+ 01m 24s
6.	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 13m 59s</b>
8.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 22m 01s

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