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HERO MOTOSPORTS BATTLES THROUGH A TOUGH MARATHON REFUGE AT DAKAR 2026

CORNEJO FINISHES 2ND IN STAGE 05; ROSS DROPS IN OVERALL RANKINGS

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has successfully completed the Stage 05 of the Dakar Rally 2026 with mixed fortunes. The stage marked the end of the rally's first Marathon Refuge, one of the toughest phases of the event.

Nacho Cornejo rode impressively and crossed the finish line with the 2nd fastest time of the day. His teammate Ross Branch finished 48th place after facing a rear-tyre issue during the Marathon. With this result, Cornejo has climbed to the 5th position in the overall general classification. Branch, despite the setback, remains firmly in the race and now sits 10th overall.



The Chilean athlete Nacho Cornejo rode with patience across both days of the Marathon Refuge, without losing momentum. The terrain was rough and unforgiving, where tyre and mousse management became the key to survival. By the 141-kilometre mark of the stage, Cornejo was holding well on to second place. He maintained a solid pace throughout the day and even passed some of the fastest riders in the rally. With this performance, Cornejo showed a clear sign of control and his trademark consistency in one of Dakar's toughest sections.



This result marked Nacho's first top-two stage finish in the Dakar rally since Stage 10 of the 2024 edition, held on a loop around AlUla. It also stood out as his strongest performance so far at Dakar 2026, underlining his growing momentum as the rally moves forward.

Branch's Marathon, meanwhile, turned into a test of survival. Damage to his rear tyre during the opening leg eventually led to mousse failure. From that point on, the focus shifted to protecting the bike and reaching the finish. Despite the tough conditions, Branch pushed through and completed the stage, showing determination during the difficult conditions.

The second leg of the Marathon Refuge on Thursday brought constant direction changes and tricky navigation. Long rocky sections on the stage made it clear that riding with caution was the key. The day covered 414 kilometres in total, with 356 kilometres against the clock.

Moving ahead from AlUla, stage number 06 on Friday will mark the longest day of Dakar 2026. Despite an ultra-early start, it promises big rewards for riders who enjoy dunes. The route runs largely through the Qassim region, where vast stretches of sand dominate the landscape. Once the special stage ends, a long liaison will direct the riders to the capital city of Riyadh for the Rest day. The challenge is massive — 920 kilometres in total, with 331 kilometres timed — and the stage could play a crucial role in shaping up the rankings before the rally heads into its second week.



Nacho Cornejo, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"We're back from the Marathon stages, and they were two really tough days. The terrain was extremely rough, especially on the bike and the tyres, so tyre and mousse management was critical. We had to ride smart and stay patient, but it paid off — we were able to put together two solid days and gain positions in the overall standings, which is very positive. Of course, it's disappointing to see Ross run into trouble with his rear tyre, and I really feel for him. The important thing is that he is still in the race and fighting. We will keep pushing together and focus on delivering the best possible result for the team. Thank you to everyone for the support — we'll continue working hard to keep improving in the overall classification."

Ross Branch, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"That brings us to the end of the Marathon stage, and unfortunately it wasn't the luckiest couple of days for us. I hit a rock yesterday that damaged the sidewall of the rear tyre, and eventually the mousse couldn't hold. I was hoping it might survive today, but it gave up quite early, which turned the stage into a real fight for survival. Still, we made it through. We're here, we're still in the race, and that's what matters right now. We'll see what tomorrow brings and take it one day at a time."

Provisional Classification - Stage 05 (Overall):

1.	Luciano Benavides	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	04h 05m 16s
2.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 03m 51s
3.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	+05m 50s
48.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 01h 17m 08s

Provisional Classification after Stage 05 (Overall):

1.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Racing Team	+ 20h 58m 10s
2.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 02m 02s
3.	Luciano Benavides	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	+ 05m 55s
5.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 18m 38s
10.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 01h 23m 53s

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