



Córdoba, Argentina, June 02, 2024

A POWERFUL START AT DESAFIO RUTA 40 FOR HERO MOTOSPORTS

ROSS BRANCH SECURES 3RD PLACE IN PROLOGUE

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, kicked off its campaign at the fourth and penultimate round of the FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) 2024 - the Desafio Ruta 40. As the current leaders of the Championship in both the rider and manufacturer rankings, team Hero MotoSports has entered this round with a challenging mission to maintain their lead.



This is the Team's second appearance at DR40 – the only American race on the W2RC 2024 calendar. Back to South American soil after a year, the team has started off the race on a positive note, with team rider and W2RC 2024 leader Ross Branch finishing the Prologue stage on the podium. Team Hero is represented by its factory riders Ross Branch, Sebastian Buhler, and latest recruit Ignacio (Nacho) Cornejo. They are also testing the waters in the Rally 2 novice category at DR40 with a young test rider, Ramiro Barco from Peru.



Rally GP class riders Ross Branch, Sebastian Buhler, and Nacho Cornejo finished the Prologue stage in the 3rd, 6th and 10th places respectively; whereas Ramiro Barco was the 5th fastest in the Rally 2 class.

After successfully completing the administrative and technical scrutiny at the Complejo Ferial de Córdoba over the last few days, 92 vehicles took to the start line for the Prologue on June 02nd (Sunday) - a 17 kilometers challenge around the legendary WRC special El Cóndor-Copina. Featuring two iconic suspension bridges flanked by rocks, and vision clouded by severe fog, this first taste of the race was a significant challenge for the competitors.

The 12th edition of the Desafio Ruta 40 has been scheduled 3 months earlier than last year's edition – landing the caravan in the heart of the harsh South American winter. The race will feature a total of 3,061 km, including 1,792 km of specials. Córdoba - the second-largest city in Argentina, and a well-known motorsports destination - plays host to this race for the first time. The Rally headquarters in Córdoba saw hundreds of motorsport fans and well-wishers flocking in to meet the athletes and teams over the past few days – a highly encouraging environment for the competitors, and the sport at large.



At the 4th round of the W2RC 2024, the Hero MotoSports team is united in their goal to defend the World Championship lead position in both the rider and manufacturer standings. Ross Branch, the W2RC leader currently has 21 and 23 points to spare over the 2nd and 3rd position holders. His team mates have the championship standings etched in their minds, and are well prepared to assist Ross in this unique mission as well. If all goes well, it will be a phenomenal feat for the Indian team, and a game-changer for the sport to have a new manufacturer take the crown.

The first official stage of the Desafio Ruta 40 2024 is scheduled on Monday, June 03rd, taking the riders on a 500+ km route through the high-altitude regions of Córdoba. After Stage 1, the rally caravan will move to San Juan, which will then host Stages 2 and 3. Stage 4 will take the competitors to last year's host city, La Rioja, before returning to Córdoba for the final finish in Stage 5.

Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"We are back at Desafio Ruta 40 – a really long race with a lot of hard kilometers in harsh desert conditions. It's also very cold here this time as it's the beginning of the winter.

We're here to defend our lead in the World Championship - especially in the rider rankings for Ross; and the entire team is here to support him in his mission. I'm also very happy to welcome Nacho Cornejo in his first race with us. As a South American pilot, he has a great leverage here at the DR40. Sebastian Buhler is also in great shape at this race after his podium in Portugal.

Apart from our three factory riders, we also have Ramiro Barco from Peru representing us for the first time in the Rally 2 category. We have been evaluating him at our recent trainings, and we will use this opportunity to test some of our new material, including the digital roadbooks that are becoming mandatory soon.

After finishing the last few races on the podiums, the team is stronger than ever, and we look forward to a strong race here."

Ross Branch:

"Prologue at Desafio Ruta 40 is over and done with. I feel so good to be back in Argentina, and really happy to see a lot of fans cheering for us here. It was a good start - a different prologue from the usual, and a lot foggy too. I'm excited to be back here with the team, and look forward to a great week of racing!"

Sebastian Buhler:

"Prologue today was quite tricky because of the visibility issues. The heavy fog from the start cleared only by around 10 km. I managed to ride safe, and am happy with the result. Let's start the Rally!"

Nacho Cornejo:

"We're done with the Prologue. It was a tricky one, with a lot of fog all across the route. I'm happy to be back in one piece, and we're getting ready for a solid 5 days of racing. It's my first race with Hero, and I'm looking forward to it eagerly!"

Ramiro Barco:

"It was a good Prologue for me, except for one small mistake in the route. I thank Hero MotoSports for this great opportunity to represent the team. Tomorrow is the first Stage, and we'll keep pushing day by day."

Provisional Rankings – Prologue Stage (Rally GP Class)

1.	Toscha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda Team	16m 45s
2.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 2s
3.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 28s
6.	Sebastian Buhler	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 49s
10.	Ignacio Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 1m 37s

Provisional Rankings – Prologue Stage (Rally 2 Class)

1.	Jeremias Pascual	Pedregà Team	17m 29s
2.	Edgar Canet Ardevol	Xraids Experience	+ 15s
3.	Romain Dumontier	Team Honda	+ 1m 15s
4.	Bradley Cox	Bas World KTM Racing Team	+ 1m 17s
5.	Ramiro Barco Oliva	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 1m 30s

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