



Agadir, October 13, 2022

AN IMPRESSIVE START FOR HERO MOTOSPORTS AT THE RALLYE DU MAROC 2023

ROSS BRANCH EARNS A PODIUM AT THE PROLOGUE

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has begun its campaign at the fifth and final round of the FIA-FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) 2023 - the Rallye Du Maroc. The rally started with a Prologue stage on October 13th, and team rider Ross Branch emerged the third fastest in this very first round.



This is the fourth appearance of the Hero team at this pure desert race, often considered a “mini-Dakar”. Piloting the Hero Rally 450 bikes in the dunes of Morocco this time are team riders Ross Branch and Sebastian Buhler. Competing in the Rally GP class, Ross and Buhler finished the Prologue stage in the 3rd and 14th positions respectively. an Dakar editions, including the team’s first two Dakar appearances in 2017 and 2018.

The third member of the Hero MotoSports team - Joaquim Rodrigues (JRod) - was all set to return to active racing at the Maroc Rally after about 8 months of recovery from his Dakar ‘23 injuries. However, a highly unfortunate crash at the last shakedown test one day before the rally has rendered him unfit to race. He will now focus on getting back to form in time for the Dakar Rally scheduled in January 2024.



After successfully completing the administrative checks and technical scrutiny on Thursday, the riders took to the start line of the Prologue stage on Friday, October 13th – an unusually long 19 km special, plus another 90 km in liaisons around Agadir – a sandy route, quite bumpy and with fast and winding tracks. By finishing 3rd today, Ross gained the priority advantage within the top-10 of the Rally GP class to pick a late starting position for Stage 1. Buhler, however, will have to open the stage for the rest of the competitors.

A record number of almost 250 vehicles and teams from across 40 nationalities have lined up at the start of the Maroc rally, of which more than half are motorcycles and quads. They are set to cover a minimum of 2,232 kilometers over 6 days, from the start line in Agadir to the finish line in Merzouga.g, temperatures are predicted to hover around 35 to 40 degree Celcius through this week.

Two thirds of the route will be specials (1,456 km) and the rest road sections (776 km). A variety of terrains await the competitors – the typical rocky sections of Morocco, the dunes of M’Hamid, areas of camel grass and long stretches of dunes, to name a few. The organizers have also warned the competitors of “the risk of getting lost” during the stages – hinting that navigation will be particularly difficult this time. To make things more challenging, temperatures are predicted to hover around 35 to 40 degree Celcius through this week.

The competition seems to be extremely tight among the top Rally GP participants – each striving to better their final positions in the championship. Ross missed the top position at the Prologue with just a 2 seconds gap, and the week ahead promises a lot more nail biting action.



The Rallye Du Maroc is also being held in the backdrop of an ongoing process of national recovery and healing from the recent violent earthquakes that have claimed the lives of over 3000 Moroccans. Hero MotoSports stands in solidarity with the race organizer’s humanitarian initiatives, and have extended full support to their noble efforts.

The first full stage of the Rallye Du Maroc 2023 is due on Saturday, October 14th, and will be the longest day of this edition. The competitors will take a 710 km route from Agadir to reach Zagora, of which 313 kms will form the timed special.

Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"We're happy to be back here in Agadir, at the last round of the W2RC 2023. We have been working hard, and really looking forward to have our full line-up at the start of the Rallye Du Maroc. Unfortunately, our rider Joaquim Rodrigues suffered an unlucky fall in the last shakedown before the race, and has injured his shoulder. He is on his way to recovery, and we are confident to have him join us at the Dakar 2024.

Ross and Buhler have been training well for over a week in Morocco, and we're sure to have some good fun at this Maroc rally. As usual, we expect all kinds of terrains, and a lot of focus on navigation. It is going to be a tough week ahead in the desert, with temperatures soaring high – here at Agadir, it is still about 40 degrees Celcius, at this time of the year.

We're excited to start the race on a good note, with Ross' third place in Prologue – just missing the top position by 2 seconds! I'm sure it will be a great week of racing, and we look forward to it."

Ross Branch:

"It was really fun to be back on the track on my Hero 450 Rally. 19 kms in the prologue was a little longer than usual, but I enjoyed it well. The stage was mostly sandy, with a lot of turns, and I think everyone was going full gas. Thanks to the entire Hero team for all the hard work so far. I'm happy to be here, and looking forward to a great week ahead!"

Sebastian Buhler:

"Prologue today was quite nice. I had a little technical issue mid-stage and had to ride carefully to reach the finish line safe. It was my birthday today, and I think it will be a great birthday gift to open the stage tomorrow!! It will be a difficult task, but I will try my best to navigate well, ahead of the other competitors."

Provisional Rankings – PROLOGUE (Rally GP Class)

1.	Tosha Schareina	Honda Team	00h 11m 03s
2.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 00s
3.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 02s
4.	Toby Price	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	+ 10s
5.	Pablo Quintanilla	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 14s
14.	Sebastian Buhler	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 3m 13s

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