



Grândola, Portugal | 17 March 2026

HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY REGISTERS A GOOD START TO RALLY RAID PORTUGAL 2026

Hero MotoSports Team Rally – the motorsport arm of the world’s largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters, Hero MotoCorp – has officially kicked off its campaign at the 2026 Rally Raid Portugal. The team began its journey in the third edition of this rally on a positive note, successfully completing the short 3 km Prologue stage and building early momentum for the week ahead.

Fielding a strong line-up of Ross Branch and Nacho Cornejo in the elite RallyGP category, the team is well-positioned for a competitive outing. Branch delivered a solid performance in the Prologue, finishing with the 10th fastest time, while Cornejo secured 21st place at the end of the opening stage. With his top-10 finish, Branch earns the advantage of selecting his starting position for Stage 1, a key strategic benefit in rally raid racing.





Following the completion of administrative and technical scrutineering, a total of 44 FIM riders took the start of Rally Raid Portugal 2026. The field includes 9 riders in RallyGP, 26 in Rally2, 6 in Rally3, 3 in Quads, and 1 in the Experimental category. RallyGP riders tackled the Prologue in reverse order of their race numbers, with the top 15 also starting in reverse order of the current W2RC standings.

The 2026 edition of the Rally Raid Portugal spans a total distance of 2,201 km, including 1,269 km of timed special stages and 932 km of liaison sections. The route has been significantly redesigned this year, introducing a new stretch reaching the Atlantic coast and offering greater variety than previous editions.

The opening special stage features more sand, adding a Dakar-like challenge early in the rally. On the second day, competitors will cross into Spain via entirely new tracks, with further fresh terrain in the Extremadura region. The loop stage around Badajoz on Day 3 remains similar to last year, followed by a return to Portugal the next morning. However, the latter part of that stage is completely new, extending all the way to Loulé. The final loop stage in the Algarve draws inspiration from a classic Dakar route and features hard-packed terrain over rolling hills, promising a demanding and varied test for the riders.

First introduced in April 2024, the Rally Raid Portugal moved to a September slot in its second edition. For 2026, the event shifts again to the end of winter, taking place just six months after the previous round. Continuing its tradition of evolving host cities, the rally will conclude in Loulé this year, following previous finishes in Grândola and Lisbon, pushing the race further south than ever before.

The first special stage on Wednesday features a loop around Grândola, covering a total distance of 315 km, with 215 km of timed sections. It will be the only stage held in Portugal at the start of the rally, before the route heads into Spain the following day. The rally will then return to Portugal on the penultimate day, adding another layer of challenge to the overall journey.



Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

“After a solid week of preparations here in Portugal, we’re pleased to be at the second round of the 2026 World Championship. It’s great to have Ross back at full strength after his Dakar setback, and the team is feeling positive heading into this round. The coming days are expected to be challenging with rain and storm conditions, but we’re ready to adapt and see how things unfold. Returning to Portugal for the third time is always special — the fans here create a fantastic atmosphere. Racing across Portugal and Spain will also bring a nice change in terrain and conditions, adding to the challenge. We’re looking forward to a strong performance and aiming for a solid result.”

Ross Branch, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

“The prologue was short but really enjoyable—just 3 km, but a great way to get started. I made a small mistake early on, but overall I had a lot of fun on the bike. I’m really happy with how the bike is responding; it’s clear that the team’s hard work is paying off. Looking ahead, I’m excited for a full week of racing across Portugal and Spain, especially with the variety of weather conditions we’re expecting. A big thank you to everyone for the continued support.”

Nacho Cornejo, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

“We’ve wrapped up the prologue—it was a short 3 km stage with a mix of sandy and carpet terrain, which made it quite enjoyable. It didn’t go exactly as we had hoped, but I’m happy with the overall feeling on the bike. The bike feels strong and ready for the longer stages ahead, and I’m looking forward to the five days of racing. With possible rain in the forecast, it’s going to be an interesting challenge, but we’ll give it our best. Thank you for all the support.”

Provisional Classification - Prologue (Overall)

01.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Racing Team	03m 01s
02.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 01s
03.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 03s
10.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 00m 08s
21.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 00m 20s

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