



Badajoz, Spain | 19 March 2026

HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY BATTLES THROUGH MIXED RESULTS IN STAGE 02 AT RALLY RAID PORTUGAL 2026

ROSS FINISHES IN TOP-10, NACHO OUT

Hero MotoSports Team Rally – the motorsport arm of the world’s largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters, Hero MotoCorp – completed Stage 2 of Rally Raid Portugal 2026 with mixed results.

Ross Branch of Botswana delivered a strong and consistent performance, crossing the finish line with the 10th fastest time. With this result, Ross remains firmly inside the overall Top-10, currently holding 6th place.





Nacho Cornejo of Chile, however, was forced to retire from the stage following a mechanical issue during a deep water crossing. Despite briefly getting the bike running again, the problem persisted, bringing an early end to his rally.

Ross Branch delivered a composed and confident performance through Stage 02, navigating a rain-soaked and highly technical route that tested both skill and judgement. With low visibility due to rains and multiple unpredictable water crossings, the stage demanded constant decision-making and precise bike control. Despite the challenging conditions, Branch maintained a strong rhythm and expressed satisfaction with the bike's performance, positioning himself well as the rally progresses into the upcoming stages.

Nacho Cornejo's campaign came to an early end during Stage 2 following a technical issue triggered by one of the stage's demanding water crossings. Riding with confidence through the challenging and unpredictable conditions, Cornejo was forced to stop after his bike encountered a problem shortly after a crossing. Although the machine restarted and continued for a few kilometres, it eventually shut down completely, with suspected water ingress affecting the engine and the electrical components. Despite making every effort to get back on track, Cornejo was unable to continue, marking a disappointing end to his Rally Raid Portugal 2026 campaign — his first retirement with Hero MotoSports since he joined the team back in 2024.

Stage 2, held on Thursday, took competitors across the border into Spain, introducing entirely new terrain in the Extremadura region. With 377 km of timed special, it was the longest and one of the most demanding stages of the rally so far. Looking ahead, Stage 3 on Friday will see riders take on a loop around Badajoz, featuring 296 km of timed sections and 205 km of liaison. The stage remains largely similar to last year's route, before the rally heads back to Portugal the following day.



Ross Branch, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

“Stage 02 was a really challenging one. We had rain throughout the morning, which made visibility quite difficult and the conditions extremely tricky. Despite that, I felt great on the bike and it performed really well. The stage had several deep water crossings, and each one was a bit of a gamble — choosing a line, left or right, and just hoping it was the correct call. Unfortunately, Nacho got caught in a particularly deep section and wasn’t able to continue today. That’s rallying sometimes. We’ll take the positives from today and keep pushing for the rest of the week.”

Nacho Cornejo, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

“Stage 2 didn’t go the way we had hoped. Unfortunately, we were forced to retire from the rally after a water crossing caused a technical issue. The bike restarted initially and ran for a few kilometres, but then stopped completely. We suspect water ingress into the engine or an electrical failure, and despite trying everything possible, we couldn’t get it running again. It’s a tough one to take — this is my first withdrawal with Hero MotoSports, and it’s definitely not a good feeling. That said, the focus now shifts to supporting the team. Ross is doing a great job out there, and I’m fully behind him to bring home a strong result. A big thank you to the entire team and all our supporters for their continued support.”

Provisional Rankings – Stage 02

01.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	02h 54m 00s
02.	Bruno Santos	BS – Frutas Patricia Pilar	+ 00m 02s
03.	Adrien Van Beveren	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 47s
10.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 06m 15s
DNF	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	--

Overall Provisional Rankings – After Stage 02

01.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Racing Team	04h 29m 55s
02.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 01m 18s
03.	Adrien Van Beveren	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 02m 17s
06.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 10m 12s
DNF	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	--

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