



Loulé, Portugal | 22 March 2026

## **HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY CONCLUDES RALLY RAID PORTUGAL 2026 WITH A STRONG TOP-10 FINISH**

### **ROSS SECURES 7TH PLACE OVERALL**

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport arm of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters – Hero MotoCorp, has successfully concluded its campaign at the Ultimate BP Rally Raid Portugal, Round 2 of the 2026 FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC).

After five demanding stages across Portugal and Spain, Ross Branch secured 7th place overall. Teammate Nacho Cornejo showed strong pace early in the rally but was forced to retire following a mechanical issue caused by a deep water crossing in Stage 2.





In Sunday's final stage, Ross clocked the 13th fastest time of the day. The decisive stage featured a 291 km loop around Loulé in the Algarve, including 190 km of liaison and 101 km of timed special. Split into two sections, the stage included a 98 km special followed by a short 2 km stretch near the Loulé Stadium to delight the spectators, bringing the rally to an exciting close.

Ross delivered a composed and consistent performance throughout the rally, navigating a wide range of challenging terrain that pushed him outside his usual comfort zone. Despite the technical nature of the European tracks, the Botswanan rider maintained steady pace across stages to secure valuable championship points. A brief off-track moment in the final mountain section added a late scare, but he recovered quickly to finish safely.

Importantly, the rally marked a positive step in rebuilding Ross's rhythm and physical condition following his Dakar injury earlier this year, laying a strong foundation as he now shifts focus to the upcoming desert round in Argentina.

Following Round 2, Ross Branch stands 8th in the 2026 World Championship standings with 23 points, while Nacho Cornejo is 9th with 14 points.

Now in its third edition, Rally Raid Portugal has quickly established itself as one of the most diverse and technically demanding events on the W2RC calendar. As the only European round and the championship's sole cross-border event, it featured nearly 2,200 km of total distance, including over 1,200 km of timed stages in its 2026 edition.

This year's rally introduced an updated route extending to the Algarve coast, offering increased variety compared to previous years. Continuing its tradition of rotating host cities for the finish, the rally concluded in Loulé this year, following earlier finishes in Grândola and Lisbon, taking the event further south.

With Rally Raid Portugal complete, Hero MotoSports now turns its attention to Round 3 – Desafio Ruta 40 in Argentina, scheduled from May 24 to 29. The team will aim to build on this momentum and deliver a strong performance in the desert terrain as the championship progresses.



**Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:**

“Overall, it was a positive week for Hero MotoSports. Ross had a scare in the final mountain stage but recovered well to finish safely, which was important as this rally helped him rebuild rhythm and physical condition after his Dakar injury. The European terrain isn’t his natural comfort zone, but it provided valuable learning. Technically, we’ve made good progress with the bike and received strong feedback, even if results don’t fully reflect it yet. It was unfortunate to lose Nacho early in Stage 2 after the water crossing incident. After a challenging week of mixed weather, it was good to end with some sunshine. Now, we look ahead to Argentina and a return to desert racing. Thanks to all our fans in Portugal, Spain and across the globe for their incredible support.”

**Ross Branch, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:**

“That’s the end of Rally Portugal, and while I’m happy to wrap it up, it’s been a really enjoyable race. The organisers did a great job putting together a challenging event. It’s not really my kind of terrain, and I didn’t feel completely comfortable throughout the week, but I’m glad to have made it through safely and picked up some valuable championship points. A big thank you to the team at Hero MotoSports for giving me a fantastic machine. Now I’m really looking forward to getting back to desert racing in Argentina in a couple of months.”

## Provisional Rankings – Stage 05

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01.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Racing Team	01h 04m 30s
02.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 00m 10s
03.	Adrien Van Beveren	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 02m 01s
<b>13.</b>	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 05m 10s</b>

## Overall Provisional Rankings – After Stage 05

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01.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Racing Team	11h 03m 53s
02.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 01m 56s
03.	Adrien Van Beveren	Monster Energy Honda HRC	+ 08m 25s
<b>07.</b>	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 25m 38s</b>

## 2026 World Rally-Raid Championship Standings (After Round 2)

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01.	Luciano Benavides	Redbull KTM Racing Team	48 Points
02.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda HRC	44 Points
03.	Daniel Sanders	Redbull KTM Racing Team	42 Points
<b>07.</b>	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>23 Points</b>
<b>09.</b>	<b>Nacho Cornejo</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>14 Points</b>

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For more information:

[www.heromotocorp.com](http://www.heromotocorp.com) | FB: /HeroMotoCorpIndia | Twitter: @HeroMotoCorp | IG: @HeroMotoCorp

Press Contact:

[corporate.communication@heromotocorp.com](mailto:corporate.communication@heromotocorp.com)

Follow the team:

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