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HERO MOTOSPORTS KICKS OFF LAST RACE OF THE 2024 SEASON IN MOROCCO

ROSS BRANCH IN STRONG CONTENTION FOR THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has launched its campaign at the fifth and final round of the FIA-FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) 2024 — the Rallye Du Maroc. The rally commenced with a Prologue stage on Sunday, in which, team rider Ross Branch crossed the finish line with a 2nd place.



This edition marks Hero MotoSports' fifth appearance at this iconic desert race, often referred to as a "mini-Dakar." The team - racing on Hero 450 Rally bikes through the mighty Sahara - includes Ross Branch, Sebastian Buhler, and Nacho Cornejo. Following successful completion of the administrative checks and technical scrutiny on Saturday, the riders took to the start line of the Prologue stage on Sunday, at the Rally HQ in Marakkech.



This first taste of the sand and stones of Morocco featured a 25 km special, with another 49 kms in road sections. In the Rally GP Class, Hero riders Ross Branch, Sebastian Buhler and Nacho Cornejo crossed the finish line in the 2nd, 7th and 12th positions respectively. By finishing in the top 10 today, Ross and Buhler gained the priority advantage within the Rally GP class to pick a late starting position for Stage 01.

Getting back to active racing after almost a 4-month break, Team Hero MotoSports is in high spirits, and eager to make the best of this race. Since the start of the season at the Dakar in January 2024, the Indian manufacturer team has showcased peak performance – starting with a 2nd place finish at the Dakar, winning the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, and soon after claiming the 2nd spot at Rally Raid Portugal.

The team's top star, Ross Branch, brought the 8-year old team's first ever Dakar podium, and has been leading the World Championship 2024 since its 2nd round. The rally world considers it a remarkable feat by this young team - going head on against the larger teams, and maintaining their lead position for 8 straight months! Ross leads the pack with 72 points - with 9 and 16 point leads over his closest rivals. All eyes are set on this battle of the titans, a fierce competition that indeed finds rally fans all over the world on tenterhooks.



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.

Moving on from Marakkech, the competitors completed a 372 km road section to reach Zagora - crossing the famous Tizi n'Tichka pass that was once a route for trade caravans across the Atlas Mountains. The first major test of the week will start as early as 5:30 AM on Monday, taking the riders on a 496 km loop around Zagora.

Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"We're super excited to be here, at this last race of the 2024 Championship. The team has trained hard, and we're ready for a challenging week ahead. It's already a huge achievement for the team to have carried the Championship lead all through the season up until now. In the past, we've been quite close to the podium a couple of times - so we knew that we had the potential to win.

Since his podium at Dakar 2024, Ross has been performing consistently well. Buhler and Nacho are also in great shape to aid the team's goals at this race. Even though we've been a smaller team with smaller resources, we've operated in a really efficient manner - and so I'm really proud of what we've achieved so far. I want to thank everyone in the team for all their hard work, dedication, and passion towards our great ambitions.

We will give our everything to bring home the best result - knowing very well that we are fighting against a much larger competitor. But we're here with the right spirit, and an attitude to fight until the last. May the best team win!"

Ross Branch:

"It was fantastic to be back on the track after four long months! I've really missed it, and being back with my rally family feels great! The 25 km prologue today was a lot of fun—thanks to the organizers for a well-executed stage. It was nice to go full throttle, and get ready for the week. I'm sure it's going to be an exciting week!"

Sebastian Buhler:

"The Prologue today was a bit challenging due to its fast pace, and some sharp turns with limited visibility — almost like it was on a mountain. Nevertheless, it was a great start. This was only the prologue; the real race kicks off tomorrow."

Nacho Cornejo:

"I took a safe pace at the Prologue and lost some time. So it looks like I'll be opening the stage tomorrow. I'm hopeful for strong performances in the upcoming stages, and together, we'll do a great job for the team."

Provisional Rankings – Prologue Stage (Rally GP Class)

1.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda Team	00h 16m 54s
2.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 18s
3.	Daniel Sanders	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	+ 18s
7.	Sebastian Buhler	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 48s
12.	Nacho Cornejo	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 2m 10s

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