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HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY ANNOUNCES RIDER LINE-UP FOR DAKAR RALLY 2026

GEARS UP FOR ITS TENTH CONSECUTIVE DAKAR APPEARANCE

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has revealed its team for the Dakar Rally 2026. Marking the team's 10th straight outing at the world's toughest rally, Hero MotoSports heads into the new season with renewed focus and valuable learnings from a challenging yet constructive 2025 season.

Returning to Saudi Arabia for the seventh year, the 2026 edition of the Dakar Rally is set to take place from **January 3rd to 17th**. Leading the charge in the Rally GP category will be the team's two factory riders – the Chilean athlete **Nacho Cornejo** and the 2024 FIM World Rally-Raid Champion from Botswana, **Ross Branch**. Joining them in the Rally2 category will be Austrian sensation **Tobias Ebster**, who joined the team in 2025.



For the Botswanan hero - Ross Branch - this will be his fourth Dakar outing with Hero MotoSports. Fondly known as the 'Kalahari Ferrari' and one of the top contenders for the Dakar title, Branch was running inside the top three overall during the first half of Dakar 2025 before a crash ended his podium charge. Stronger, sharper and more determined than ever, Ross aims to convert his pace into a big finish this January. Branch's best Dakar outing came in 2024, where he secured a remarkable 2nd-place finish - delivering a historic milestone for Hero as the first-ever Dakar podium for an Indian manufacturer team.



Preparing for his second Dakar with Hero MotoSports, Nacho Cornejo brings an impressive Dakar track record - 9 stage wins and a career-best 4th overall in 2020. He finished in seventh place in 2025, securing the team's second-best Dakar result to date. Nacho had an outstanding 2025 season, consistently emerging as the team's most reliable performer. He finished inside the top-10 in four of the five races, firmly cementing his reputation as Mr. Dependable. With growing synergy and momentum, Nacho arrives positioned for a major breakthrough.

One of rally-raid's brightest emerging talents, Tobias Ebster joins Hero MotoSports for his first Dakar as a factory rider. He burst onto the scene by winning the "Original by Motul" category in his debut Dakar in 2024 and finishing 20th overall - earning the Best Rookie title. He climbed further to 9th overall in Dakar 2025, becoming the top privateer.

Tobias delivered a commendable 2025 campaign, leading the Rally2 standings through the first three rounds. He concluded the season as the runner-up in the FIM Rally-Raid World Cup for Rally2 riders - an impressive achievement in his debut year with Hero at this level.



The 48th edition of the Dakar Rally will be held from January 3 to 17, 2026, kicking off in Yanbu on the Red Sea, crossing the vast Saudi desert through Riyadh and returning to Yanbu for the finish. This edition will feature a prologue and 13 special stages, including two marathon stages, one in each week, where riders will camp in the desert with limited support.

Just as it has since 2022, Dakar will open the upcoming season of the **FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC)**. Hero MotoSports will compete in both Rally GP and Rally2 categories through the five-round championship - beginning with Dakar (Saudi Arabia), followed by BP Ultimate Rally Raid Portugal (Portugal-Spain, March), Desafío Ruta 40 (Argentina, May), Rallye Du Maroc (Morocco, Sep-Oct) and concluding for the first time ever at the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (UAE, November).

Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"As the countdown to Dakar 2026 and the opening round of the next W2RC season continues, our preparations are in full swing. All race bikes, spares, assistance vehicles and equipment have been tested and shipped from Barcelona and will be received in Yanbu on December 30. The riders are currently in their final phase of training with navigation drills and race simulations underway."

"After overcoming challenges in 2025 and achieving strong development progress on the Hero 450 Rally, we are excited to see Ross Branch and Nacho Cornejo attack the Rally GP class once again and look forward to watching Tobias Ebster step up in Rally2 with the goal of pushing for top honors. With a fantastic crew behind us and the unwavering support of the global Hero family, we look forward to taking on the desert, testing our limits and chasing new milestones. Stay tuned - the adventure begins soon."

For more information:

www.heromotocorp.com / FB: /HeroMotoCorpIndia / Twitter: @HeroMotoCorp / IG: @HeroMotoCorp

Press Contact:

corporate.communication@heromotocorp.com

Follow the team:

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