



Hermosillo (Mexico), April 24, 2023

HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY REGISTERS A POWERFUL START TO SONORA RALLY 2023

TEAM'S DEBUT RACE IN THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT

Hero MotoSports Team Rally, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, started its campaign at the third round of the FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) - the Sonora Rally 2023, with a two-rider line-up.



Back from a powerful performance at their last outing in Abu Dhabi, the team is in great shape and excited about their return to the Americas since Dakar 2019. This is their first race in Mexico, thanks to Sonora Rally becoming part of the W2RC 2023.

At Mexico, the team is represented by factory riders Ross Branch and Sebastian Buhler. Competing in the Rally GP class, Ross and Buhler finished the Prologue stage in the 6th and 13th positions respectively. These results place the riders in good positions to start the first stage due on April 24th.



After successfully completing the administrative checks and technical scrutiny on April 22nd (Saturday), the competitors took to the start line for the Prologue on Sunday - a quick 10 kilometers at the Cerro Colorado Speedway, in Hermosillo, the capital city of Sonora state. Ross Branch finished the Prologue just 9 seconds behind the first spot, and Buhler 24 seconds.

The Sonora Rally, now in its 9th edition, has become widely popular for its Dakar style stages set up in the hottest desert of North America. A race with multiple stages, a road book, and no assistance between the start and finish of each stage, has over the years attracted competition from top international talent. Sonora is the second largest state of Mexico, with almost 70% covered in arid desert, and shares a border with the US State of Arizona. It is also one of the hottest states in Mexico, with temperatures often soaring above 40 °C (104° F).

This is a key milestone for both W2RC and Sonora Rally – bringing the international elite to compete with North American local talent in a historic first. For W2RC, this is a foray into uncharted territory, that which creates a true cultural melting pot within the racing community.

A record 115 vehicles have lined up at the bivouac in Hermosillo, Sonora - a majority of whom are the top brass of international FIA/FIM riders and teams, aiming for the top spots in the W2RC championship. The Rally spans over five days in the Sonoran Desert, covering nearly 2300 kilometers across a mix of terrains ranging from soft dunes to open beaches, riverbeds and fast tracks. Starting down south and finishing in the North close to the US-Mexico border, Sonora Rally is set to see some extreme action in the otherwise sparsely populated region.



For both Hero MotoSports riders Ross Branch and Sebastian Buhler, racing in Mexico is a first. Confident from his powerful performance at Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (ADDC) 2023 that was studded a top-5 finish, Ross is looking forward to some great exploits at his first Sonora Rally. Sebastian Buhler is also in good spirits, eager to showcase a solid performance in this unique desert.

The first official stage of the Sonora Rally 2023 is due on Monday, April 24th, taking the riders on a 339 km route in the ranchlands surrounding the Sonoran capital city of Hermosillo. The competitors will return to Hermosillo, before shifting camp northward in Stage 2.

Wolfgang Fischer, Team Manager, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:

"We are really excited to be back at a race in the Americas after a long break since Dakar 2019. It's our first time in Mexico, and it is also the first time Mexico is entering the World Championship. The desert here is interesting - it's one of the most biodiverse in the world. The rally's route is quite challenging, and promises varied terrains with pistes through big ranches in the South, sandy tracks in the coastal region, and long stretches of dunes towards the finish in the North of Sonora.

"Ross and Buhler are feeling well and fit, and we're confident of a great performance here at Sonora. JRod is still recovering from his leg injury from the Dakar. The prologue went well, and we look forward to a good Stage 1 tomorrow."

Ross Branch:

"The prologue today was amazing! For me, it was quite similar to riding back home in Botswana. I had a great time, and I think we're in a good position to start the race tomorrow. My Hero 450 performed at peak today, and we are confident of a great week ahead. The team is happy and in good spirits, and we are looking forward to go out and have some fun tomorrow at the first stage!"

Sebastian Buhler:

"The Prologue stage here at Mexico was slippery, but a fun one. I did not feel very fast on the track today, and the result is also not the best. I might have to start the first stage early on in the order, but I will definitely make the best of it. The team is positive, and we are ready for the challenging week ahead."

Provisional Rankings – Prologue Stage (Rally GP Class)

1.	Toby Price	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	5m 28s
2.	Luciano Benavides	Husqvarna Factory Racing	+ 5s
3.	Tosha Schareina	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 6s
6.	Ross Branch	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 9s
13.	Sebastian Buhler	Hero MotoSports Team Rally	+ 24s

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