



Sun City, South Africa | 20 May 2025

## HERO MOTOSPORTS TEAM RALLY WINS STAGE 1 AT SOUTH AFRICAN SAFARI RALLY 2025

### ROSS BAGS STAGE 1, SECURES OVERALL LEAD

**Hero MotoSports Team Rally**, the motorsport team of the world's largest manufacturer of motorcycles and scooters - **Hero MotoCorp**, has concluded the first special stage at the South African Safari Rally 2025 – the third round of the FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) 2025.

In the opening stage of the rally, the local Botswanan Hero, Ross Branch led the charge for the team by crossing the finish line with the fastest time overall, bringing his first stage win this season. His teammates Nacho Cornejo and Tobias Ebster, the team's newest recruit, also delivered solid rides by finishing 6th and 9th overall, respectively. Meanwhile, competing in the Rally 2 class, Tobias made a strong mark by claiming 2nd position in the category in today's stage — finishing less than a minute behind the leader — showcasing both speed and consistency.





At the close of today's Stage 1, all three Hero riders sit comfortably in the overall top-10 rankings: Ross leading the board, Nacho at 7th, and Tobias at 9th. Tobias also holds 2nd position in the overall Rally 2 standings, reinforcing Hero MotoSports' competitive edge across categories.

Racing on home soil and building on his top-10 finish in yesterday's Prologue, the "Kalahari Ferrari" started second into today's special stage. He quickly set the pace, took over the lead midway, and was the first rider to cross the finish line. His teammate and Chilean rally star Nacho Cornejo had a flying start to the day. He was the fastest rider while crossing the 18 km checkpoint, showing blistering pace early on. Though he slipped down the order later in the stage, Nacho's solid and reliable riding still earned him a commendable finish — proving once again why he's such a dependable force for the team.

Tobias Ebster, the latest addition to the Hero MotoSports squad, continued to impress. The young Austrian talent is looking increasingly confident with his new machine. His performance underscored his potential and adaptability as he settles into life under the Hero tent.

Today's first stage was a loop around Sun City, stretching across a total of 555 km, including 260 km special. Unlike previous rounds, no time bonuses were planned for the motorcycle opener today, placing greater emphasis on pure performance and consistency. The riders faced a fascinating mix of terrain with sandy tracks, typical savannah stretches, the region's characteristic "black turf," and dominant hard-packed surfaces. This diverse blend of soil textures challenged them with its unpredictable grip levels. There were a lot of deep muddy sections owing to heavy rains in the recent week.



Looking ahead, Stages 2 and 3 have been combined into a two-day marathon stage, with tomorrow marking the first leg. Riders will tackle a total of 620 km tomorrow, including 352 km of timed special, without any overnight assistance from their support crews. They will camp in a remote bivouac, fully self-reliant until the end of Stage 3. The route will lead competitors into the vast savannah, featuring long, fast tracks and scattered off-piste sections that will test both navigation and strategy. With wide open terrain and limited reference points, riders must rely entirely on their roadbooks and instincts to stay on track and gain valuable time.



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

*"Stage 1 is in the books, and I'm really happy with how it went. I opened for a large part of the day, and that was a great confidence booster for me. Everything went smoothly, and we had some good fun out there. It felt great to be back on the old tracks and in the bush — just like I remembered it. Riding a rally bike through this kind of terrain is such a different experience, and I truly enjoyed it. Everything is going well so far, and I'm looking forward to tomorrow."*

**Nacho Cornejo, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:**

*"Stage 1 is done — it wasn't a bad stage. I finished 6th overall in the stage, which is a decent start, though it could have been better. I made a couple of small mistakes here and there, but overall, I'm happy with how we've kicked off the South African Safari Rally. We've got four more days to go, and they're going to be intense — with frequent changes in direction and tightly packed notes in the roadbook. It's shaping up to be a challenging and exciting week ahead."*

### **Tobias Ebster, Rider, Hero MotoSports Team Rally:**

*"Stage 1 is over, and it was definitely an interesting one. Everyone expected the navigation to be relatively easy, but it turned out to be quite the opposite. I got lost a few times—though it seemed like that happened to almost everyone out there today. There was definitely an advantage to starting a bit further back, as riders had to navigate entirely on their own with no traces to follow. Overall, I'm really happy with my pace and while I'm still getting used to the bike, things are coming together nicely. Some parts of the route were quite deep with tricky mudholes, but I really enjoyed the challenge. If the rest of the week goes like this, we're in a good position to bring it home."*

### **Provisional Classification of Stage 1 (Overall):**

1.	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 02h 44m 04s</b>
2.	Adrien Van Beveren	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 00m 55s
3.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 01m 09s
6.	<b>Nacho Cornejo</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 07m 33s</b>
9.	<b>Tobias Ebster</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 12m 06s</b>

### **Provisional Classification after Stage 1 (Overall):**

1.	<b>Ross Branch</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 02h 51m 32s</b>
2.	Adrien Van Beveren	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 00m 50s
3.	Ricky Brabec	Monster Energy Honda Team	+ 01m 03s
7.	<b>Nacho Cornejo</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 07m 50s</b>
9.	<b>Tobias Ebster</b>	<b>Hero MotoSports Team Rally</b>	<b>+ 12m 06s</b>

### **Provisional Classification of Stage 1 (Rally2):**

1.	Edgar Canet	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	+ 02h 55m 59s
2.	<b>Tobias Ebster</b>	<b>Monster Energy Honda Team</b>	<b>+ 00m 12s</b>

### **Provisional Classification after Stage 1 (Rally2):**

1.	Edgar Canet	Redbull KTM Factory Racing	+ 03h 03m 20s
2.	<b>Tobias Ebster</b>	<b>Monster Energy Honda Team</b>	<b>+ 00m 18s</b>

\*\*\*\*\*

### **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:**

[www.heromotosports.com](http://www.heromotosports.com) | IG: @Heromotosports | FB: HeroMotoSports | Twitter:@hero\_motosports

