**BRABEC, BRANCH CONTINUE EPIC DAKAR BIKE BATTLE**

*Overall leaders just 42 seconds apart as Benavides takes Stage 8*

Dakar’s bike race game of cat and mouse continued into stage 8 on Tuesday, as leader Ricky Brabec came home seventh ahead of closest rival Ross Branch in eighth to keep the gap between them within a minute. While Brabec led throughout the morning, he faded later in the day to allow the Benavides brothers, Kevin’s KTM to take the 458 km race to Ha’il from Luciano on a Husqvarna.

Honda rider, Californian Brabec was in flying form over the first 400 km of the day ahead of a fraught battle for second. That saw teammates Chilean Pablo Quintanilla and Frenchman Adrien van Beveren fighting over the place, with the Benavides brothers and Branch keeping them honest. Van Beveren was however ahead of Brabec at the penultimate waypoint, with Kevin Benavides third.

Benavides was ahead of Brabec at the final waypoint, before both he and brother Luciano managed to find a way past van Beveren by the finish as the KTM man finally broke a long line of Honda Stage wins since his own previous win on Day 3. It was even worse for Brabec, who tumbled to seventh behind another Chilean teammate, Jose Florimo, Toby Price’s KTM and Rui Gonçalves on a Sherco.

Brabec was just 41 seconds ahead of Botswana Hero rider Ross Branch to extend his overall advantage to just 42 seconds. Third overall, Florimo meanwhile closed his deficit down on both the bike leaders and sits 4 minutes 21 seconds off the lead, with van Beveren, Kevin Benavides and Price in chase.

Of the rest of the Southern Africans, Bradley Cox enjoyed a great stage and led Rally 2 on the fringes of the overall top ten for most of the morning. Like some of the leaders, he slipped back to finish the day fifteenth and fourth in R2. Cox also sits 25th overall and fifth in Rally 2, just 19 minutes behind class leader Romain Dumontier.

Charan Moore had a solid ride to 29th on Tuesday and sits 18th overall and seventh in Rally 2 on his Husqvarna. Zimbabwean Ash Thixton followed Moore home in 35th on his similar machine and he sits 32nd overall. KTM riders, Malle Moto no service rider Stuart Gregory sat 83rd and was provisionally Ronald venter was placed 77th on the day and 63rd overall.

Tuesday’s 417 km race to Al’Ula includes a little bit of everything. With four days and almost 2,000 km left to race, Dakar is by no means close to completion. Anything can still happen!