**SHORT DAKAR BIKE DAY FULL OF SURPRISES**

*Branch closes up on Brabec on balance of Chrono stage*

It was a short, sharp race to the finish of Dakar’s 48-hour Chrono stage for the bike leaders on Friday morning, but still it was enough to shuffle the order up front and provide its fair share of drama, too.

Overnight leader Adrien van Beveren’s Honda duly took the stage. Toby Price and his KTM however overcame second placed Honda Rider Ricky Brabec, who also lost almost three minutes of his advantage over Botswana’s Ross Branch. The Hero rider will start the second week just 51 seconds behind Price in second when racing resumes Sunday after the rest day.

There was also drama as Branch’s Hero teammate retired after a mechanical issue early on Friday, but besides Price moving to second over Brabec, the rest of the top ten remained as it was Thursday evening. Which meant that van Beveren took the day from Price and Brabec with Daniel Sanders’ GasGas fourth from Branch, Luciano Benavides on his Husqvarna, Jose Florimo’s Honda, and Kevin Benavides’ KTM.

Of the South Africans, Bradley Cox ended 14th and fifth in Rally 2 on his BAS KTM, Husqvarna duo Charan Moore was 24th and Zimbabwean Ashton Thixton 39th. KTM men, no service rider Stuart Gregory sat 76th and Ronald Venter 93rd.

Overall at the end of week 1, Brabec leads Branch by that 51 seconds with Florimo three and a half minutes adrift in third. Van Beveren is fourth, nine minutes off the lead and well clear of Price, Kevin Benavides, Sanders, and Luciano Benavides in 8th. Bradley Cox is 16th overall and fifth in Rally 2, Moore 22nd, Thixton 33rd, Gregory provisionally 72nd and Venter 86th.

Dakar 2024 now takes its much needed rest day in Riyadh on Saturday before resuming with 483 km of racing dirt tracks, sand and a few more dunes to Al Duwadimi on Sunday.