



FOUR CREWS VIE FOR SPECIAL VEHICLE CHAMPIONSHIP

It could not have been better scripted.

In a tense finale to the season four crews will fight it out for the Special Vehicle championship at the final round of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, the Atlas Copco Gold 400, in Westonaria on November 22 and 23. And, to add a little spice to proceedings, a fifth driver is also in the mix when it comes to the overall championship.

It promises to be an intriguing weekend and, if you were a punter, you would lean towards putting your money on reigning champions Evan Hutchison and Danie Stassen to take back to back titles in the Motorite BAT Viper. Hutchison and Stassen go into the final shootout with a precious 12.5 lead over KwaZulu-Natal crew Clint Gibson and Gary Campbell in the Dirt Sport Components Porter – and that could be decisive.

Former champions Hermann and Wichard Sullwald (Elegant Fuel Stryker) are just three points behind the KZN pair with Philip de Vries/Johan Viljoen (Conqueror Porter) still in with a mathematical chance of sneaking in via the back door. De Vries/Viljoen are 22.5 points behind the leaders, but the last two events have produced topsy turvy results and in cross country racing you can always expect the unexpected.

On the driver front the Class A big guns could all be upstaged by the enigmatic Colin Matthews who again teams up with rookie Rodney Burke in the Century Racing CR3 running in Class P. Matthews has twice won overall this season, and that will generate a few nervous twitches among the Class A brigade.

Where the overall and Class A title contenders are concerned there is a level playing field. None of them has to worry about dropping one score, and for Hutchison and Stassen third or better will be enough to secure both championships.

It all boils down to a combination of pace and reliability. The Vryburg 400 and the more recent Ford Dealer 400 produced surprise results that have kept the two championships in a state of flux.

A non finish on the Ford event scuppered Quintin and Kallie Sullwald, in the Elegant Fuel BAT but they, along with a couple of other teams, could play influential roles in the final outcome of the title race. Daniel and Louw Zeelie (Maxxis/Liqui Moly/Rockstar Porter) and Daniel Brookes/Gavan Gray (Ducatus Property BAT) go into the race on the back of recent solid results.

Lance Trethewey and Geoff Minnitt (LT Earthmovers BAT) also join the list of potential winners and former champion John Weir-Smith (Porter) returns to racing after a lengthy break. Weir-Smith will be partnered by Richard Foyn and will have to shake off plenty of ring rust.

And then there is the Matthews factor. Apart from being a contender in the overall driver title race, the Century Racing flyer is also involved in the Class P title chase with Swaziland based John Thomson.

Matthews trails Hutchison by 22 points in the overall stakes and is 17 points behind Thomson in the Class P championship. Matthews has so far this season made use of three co-drivers and Maurice Zermatten, who sits alongside Thomson, has already wrapped up the navigator's championship.

Thomson/Zermatten and the father/daughter combination of Coetzee and Sandra Labuscagne (Chem Systems Zarco) have both won twice this season but have not been able to match Matthews - and whoever sits alongside

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him - for sheer pace. For Matthews the key to both championships is to combine pace with reliability and, in the case of the overall driver stakes, hope for a string of surprise results among the leading Class A fraternity.

With championships there to be won or lost a trip to Westonaria will provide enthusiasts with a highly entertaining weekend of racing in a pressure cooker situation. Race headquarters, the start/finish and designated service park will all be located at the Kloof Country Club in Glenharvie, with free public entrance to these areas and spectator points along the route.

The qualifying race on November 22 to determine grid positions will start at noon with race starting at 8:30 on November 23. The qualifying race will be run over a 60 kilometre route, with the race over two loops of 170 kilometres with a compulsory 15 minute service halt at the end of the first lap.

Ends

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