



PRIDE AT STAKE IN FINAL PRODUCTION VEHICLE RACE

Pride will be at stake among the Production Vehicle factory and privateer teams on the Atlas Copco Gold 400, the final round of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, in Westonaria on November 22 and 23.

For the first time in a couple of seasons the overall and premier Class SP titles have failed to go all the way to the wire. Team Castrol Toyota crew Anthony Taylor and Dennis Murphy, propelled by a string of four wins in a row, clinched both championships with a fourth place on the recent Ford Dealer 400 in Thaba 'Nchu.

That shifts the main focus to the minor placings in the overall and SP Class championships, and the battle for privateer bragging rights between two Atlas Copco teams campaigning Nissan Navara and Toyota Hilux entries.

The factory Ford Racing pair of Chris Visser and Japie Badenhorst and Duncan Vos and Rob Howie, in the second works Castrol Toyota Hilux, will fight for second and third in the overall and SP Class while team-mates Gary Bertholdt/Siegfried Rousseau (Atlas Copco Nissan Navara) and Johan van Staden and Mike Lawrenson (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) will scrap over top place among the privateers.

Where the factory battle is concerned Visser/Badenhorst will be slight favourites by virtue of a 17.5 lead over reigning champions Vos and Howie. The Castrol Toyota crew scored their first win of the season on the recent Ford Dealer 400, but Visser/Badenhorst have been models of consistency this season with seven podium finishes.

Lance Woolridge and Ward Huxtable, in the second factory Ford Ranger, and Visser/Badenhorst won the first two races of the season, but since then Taylor/Murphy and Vos/Howie have taken five straight wins for the Castrol Toyota squad. Visser and Badenhorst will make their Dakar Rally debut early next year, and a win would preserve their podium record and provide the Ford Racing squad with a confidence boost before their South American campaign.

The situation in the privateer battle is a little closer. Here only 6.5 points separate Bertholdt and Rousseau and van Staden and Lawrenson, and that sets up an interesting little cameo between the two Atlas Copco teams. Woolridge/Huxtable were also part of the mix but will use this race as a test session for the Dakar Rally car.

A little further down another little privateer cameo has potential for drama. Only seven points separate Malcolm Kock/Johan Burger (Kock and Son Toyota Hilux), Regent Racing Nissan Navara pair Mike Whitehouse and Matthew Carlson, Free Staters Louw de Bruin/Riaan Greyling (Ruwacon Ford Ranger) and North West crew Hugo de Bruyn and Henri Hugo in the Micaren Exel Toyota Hilux.

Atlas Copco will also be hoping for another strong performance from Dakar Rally quad star Sarel van Biljon and Philip Herselman who led the privateer brigade with a fifth place on the Ford Dealer 400. A string of other teams will also be looking to end the season on a high note, and there will be a fair bit of interest in Richard Fuller's first outing in the ex Christiaan du Plooy/Henk Janse van Vuuren RFS BMW X3.

Fuller makes his Production Vehicle debut but will have the experienced Andre Vermeulen sitting alongside him. At the other end of the experience stick comedian Barry Hilton will co-drive for Archie Rutherford in the Imperial Automotive Nissan Navara, and is likely to be something of a draw card.

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With a 17 point lead over Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux) in Class D young North West crew Jason Venter and Vincent van Allemann (Trysome Toyota Hilux) have one hand on the championship trophy. The two crews have produced stirring battles in recent races and another thriller is on the cards with the Horns, after a patchy start to the season, looking for a fourth win in a row.

After securing back to back Class E titles Dirk Putter and Koos Claasens (Ford Ranger) sit out another event and Douglas Fear/Kurt de Villiers will be heavy favourites for a fourth win in the Brytons Removals Toyota Hilux. Opposition comes by way of Johan Pretorius/Gesina Dauth (Toyota Hilux) and newcomers Jannie Greef and Robbie Roos in a Nissan Hardbody.

The final round of the Northern regions championship will be run in conjunction with the national event with race headquarters, the start/finish and the designated service park all located at the Kloof Country Club in Glenharvie. Public access to these areas and spectator points along the route is free of charge.

The 60 kilometre qualifying race on November 22 to determine grid positions will start at noon and the race at 08:30 the following day. The race will be run over two loops of 170 kilometres with a compulsory 15 minute service stop at the end of the first lap.

Ends

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