



## DAY OF SURPRISES IN PRODUCTION VEHICLE QUALIFYING RACE

Glenharvie, Friday – It was a day of surprises in the Production Vehicle qualifying race at the Atlas Copco Gold 400, the final round of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, here today.

Force Fuel Toyota pair Luke Botha and Jason Rathbone came up with the biggest surprise of the season when they upstaged a host of more fancied teams to win the qualifying race by the narrowest of margins. Botha and Rathbone were just one second ahead of Richard Fuller and Andre Vermeulen (BMW X3), with Dakar Rally quad hero Sarel van Biljon and Philip Herselman a further eight seconds off the pace in the Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux.

They were followed by the two factory Team Castrol Toyota Hilux entries of outgoing champions Duncan Vos and Rob Howie, and newly crowned champions Anthony Taylor and Dennis Murphy. Only 50 seconds separated the top five, with Vos and Howie involved in a battle for the runners-up spot in the overall championship with Ford Racing pair Chris Visser and Japie Badenhorst, who had a bad day at the office and were down in 20<sup>th</sup> place.

Adding to the surprise element is the fact that Botha has not picked up a single point this season, and Rathbone is making his debut on this event. After a successful stint in the Special Vehicle category, including a win on the Sun City 400 in a Class P car, Fuller is making his debut in the Production Vehicle category, while Vermeulen is a widely experienced cross country and rally campaigner.

“It was very difficult out there,” said Vermeulen. “The route is tight and very technical and it was easy to make mistakes.

“It is going to be a very tough race for co-drivers.”

There was another surprise behind fifth placed Taylor/Murphy with Kobus van Tonder and daughter Lizelle taking sixth place in the UniFreight Ford Ranger. Van Tonder is another driver who has not scored a point this season, and is paired for the first time with his daughter.

The van Tonders were 33 seconds ahead of North West pair Hugo de Bruyn and Henri Hugo, in the Micaren Exel Toyota Hilux, with Gary Bertholdt and Siegfried Rousseau (Atlas Copco Nissan Navara) completing the top eight. Bertholdt and Rousseau were exactly a minute behind de Bruyn and Hugo.

Mpumalanga brothers Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Land Cruiser) led the Class D contingent after the withdrawal of youngsters Jason Venter and Vincent van Alleman in the Trysome Toyota Hilux. Venter and van Alleman clinched the championship last time out, and the Toyota has been sold.

Dana Vos and Hendrik de Kock (Vossies Toyota Hilux) and Jack and Sarel Oosthuizen (LMC Land Rover) were a long way behind in second and third. The Oosthuizens are former Class D champions.

With back to back championships in the bag Dirk Putter and Koos Claasens also give this race a miss, and Class E was dominated by Douglas Fear and Kurt de Villiers in the Brytons Removals Toyota Hilux. Fear and de Villiers are looking for a fourth win this season and were comfortably ahead of Johan Pretorius/Gesina Dauth (Toyota Hilux) and newcomers Jannie Greeff/Robbie Roos in a Nissan Hardbody.

Tomorrow's race starts at 08:30 with the start/finish and designated service point at the Kloof Country Club in Glenharvie. The race will be run over two loops of 170 kilometres with a compulsory 15 minute service halt after the first lap.

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