



## BACK TO BACK TITLES FOR HUTCHISON/STASSEN

The Motorite BAT Viper pair of Evan Hutchison and Danie Stassen limped home in fifth place on the Atlas Copco Gold 400, final round of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, to clinch back to back Special Vehicle category championships.

Interim scoring saw a maiden victory for Philip de Vries and Johan Viljoen, in the Conqueror Porter, lift the pair from fifth to second in the overall and Class A championships. De Vries and Viljoen finished more than six minutes ahead of Quintin Sullwald and cross country debutant Janine Lourens, in the Elegant Fuel BAT Venom, with halfway leaders Marius and Jolinda Fourie (PHB BAT) completing the podium.

Fourth place went to Neil Meyer and Joseph Lewis (Maxxis/Liqui Moly/Rockstar Zarco), with Hutchison and Stassen surviving a string of scares on the second of the 170 kilometre loops that made up the race. Punctures, alternator problems and a broken fan belt all added up to a nervous finish for the Motorite crew, who also completed the last three kilometres with a flat tyre.

“What a day,” said a relieved Hutchison afterwards. “We made winning the championship difficult for ourselves.

“It was a tough season but we hung in there. I have never ever driven with a flat tyre in a race, but with three kilometres to go we decided to bite the bullet.”

De Vries and Viljoen finished second in the Friday qualifying race and put together a consistent weekend. Their only problem came when Viljoen’s cellular phone slipped under the accelerator on the second loop.

“The last 10 kilometres were a bit of a strain,” said de Vries. “Otherwise we had a good run, and the phone must have dropped out of the car because we can’t find it.”

Qualifying race winners Brett Parker and VZ van Zyl (Sizanani Plastics Jimco) gradually dropped down the pecking order as the race progressed, and eventually finished ninth. At the halfway stage de Vries/Viljoen were lying second behind the husband and wife pairing of Marius and Jolinda Fourie in the PHB BAT who ran into loop two woes.

The Fouries finished the last 100 kilometres with steering problems and could not hold off de Vries/Viljoen and Sullwald/Lourens who ran the last 90 kilometres with the car stuck in third gear. Meyer and Lewis lost time stuck in a deep ditch, and Hutchison and Stassen eventually finished just 12 seconds clear of KwaZulu-Natal crew Clint Gibson and Gary Campbell in the Dirt Sport Component Porter.

Gibson and Campbell started the weekend second in the championship and 12.5 points behind Hutchison and Stassen. They were hit by a spate of punctures and after running out of wheels were bailed out by Hermann and Wichard Sullwald (Elegant Fuel Stryker) who lent them two spares.

A solid seventh overall clinched the Class P championship for Swaziland based driver John Thomson and Maurice Zermatten in a Zarco. Zermatten clinched the co-driver title at the previous event with the pair having another steady outing with no histrionics.

Thomson took a tight grip on the Class P driver title when closest rival Colin Matthews, partnered by Rodney Burke in the Century Racing CR3, retired from the qualifying race with a broken side shaft. Starting from the back of the field effectively ended any hope Matthews had of winning the overall and Class P driver titles.

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Thomson and Zermatten were followed home by the Zeelie brothers, Daniel and Louw, who came up with another solid performance in the Maxxis/Liqui Moly/Rockstar Porter and Keith Makenete and Peter Hlutwa (Zarco) who completed the top 10 and were second in Class P. For Makenete and Hlutwa it was their best result of the season.

Ends

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