



FRESH LOOK FOR DONALDSON CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP

The Donaldson Cross Country Championship will, in many ways, present a fresh face when the 2014 series opens in the Free State at the end of this month.

New venues, new rules and regulations, a new race format and a new racing category all add up to an impressive new look for a championship which last year averaged more than 70 entries per event. And, with the trend of recent seasons likely to be unchanged, both the Production Vehicle and Special Vehicle championships will again be highly competitive.

This year's first event on February 28 and March 1, the RFS 450 in Harrismith, sees a change of venue. For the last couple of seasons the race has been based at Tarlton International Raceway on the outskirts of Krugersdorp. Other venue changes will see the Toyota Dealer 450 move from Eston and later in the year the Toyota Kalahari Botswana 1000 Desert Race in Botswana will also have a new home. After a number of years of being based at Kumakwane, on the outskirts of Gaborone, the race will move to the Jwaneng area. This is at the request of the Botswana tourism authorities who want to see the race rotated to new venues.

This year will also see changes to the race format. Qualifying races to determine race start positions will now be run over 100 kilometres, and race distance has been increased to 450 kilometres.

And, in a significant development, the South African National Off Road Racing Association (SANORA) has decided to split the premier Production Vehicle category - the SP Class - into two classes. The move is aimed at levelling the playing field between older cars, utilising V6 engines, and new V8 powered vehicles which make use of the latest technology.

Class T will now cater for vehicles with an engine capacity of 4 000cc and over with either independent or solid axle rear suspension. Class S will cater for vehicles with an engine capacity of up to 4 000 cc with solid rear suspension only and, in both cases, existing technical rules apply.

SANORA said while it did not want to hamper future technical advancement within the SP Class, it was important to protect an existing customer base and their respective investments. Class T and Class S will race and score independently.

The RFS 450 will also see the launch of the new Side by Side category. The new category falls into line with a growth strategy for cross country racing, and is aimed at bringing new competitors into cross country racing.

The Side by Side category will act as a feeder for the national Production and Special Vehicle categories, with only the Polaris RZR and Can Am Maverick allowed to compete. As part of a research and development project and to fine tune rules and regulations, a number of Side by Side entries competed in national events towards the end of last season.

The new class will complete the qualifying race and 50 percent or one loop of Donaldson Cross Country Championship races. Side by Side will also compete independently of the premier categories, and will start after the national championship classes.

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SANORA will also continue with the popular Imperial Auto Celebrity Challenge which sees sports and entertainment stars getting a taste of cross country racing. SANORA marketing executive Terence Marsh will this year take over driving duties from Archie Rutherford in the Imperial Auto Nissan Navara, with television personality and international model Marius Roberts first up in the hot seat on the RFS450.

Race headquarters, the start/finish and the designated service area for the RFS450 will be based at the La La Nathi resort on the outskirts of Harrismith. Public entry to these areas and spectator points along the route is free of charge.

Ends

Follow the Donaldson Cross Country Championship action on:

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