



A TWO HORSE RACE IN SPECIAL VEHICLE CHAMPIONSHIP

Father and son teams set the early pace in overall and Class A title chases

After three rounds of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, a two horse race looks to have developed in the Special Vehicle overall and Class A championships.

A combination of reliability problems and missed races from teams highly fancied for honours at the beginning of the championship, have contrived to see two teams break away from the rest of the pack. Both are father and son combinations and between them they have won all three races so far this season.

Gerhard du Plessis and his 16-year-old son Hardus, in an ageing Jimco, are the only Special Vehicle competitors with a 100 percent finish record this season. A win and two podium finishes gives them a nine point cushion at the top of the overall and Class A leaderboards.

A timely win – their second of the season – on the recent Nkomazi 450 in Mpumalanga has taken former champions Quintin and Kallie Sullwald (Elegant Fuel BAT Venom) into second place in the overall championship. For the Sullwalds it was the best possible recovery after failing to finish the Toyota Dealer 450 in Mooi River.

The big losers so far this season are reigning champions Evan Hutchison and Danie Stassen in the Motorite BAT Viper. A second successive non finish in Mpumalanga dealt hopes of back to back titles a heavy body blow.

Two early season non finishes also put another pair of former SA champions, Hermann and Wichard Sullwald (Elegant Fuel Stryker) on the back foot. KwaZulu-Natal crew Clint Gibson and Gary Campbell (Dirt Sport Components Porter) also failed to finish the Mooi River event and, after missing the Nkomazi 450, are also in a spot of bother where the championships are concerned.

As matters stand in the overall championship the second placed Sullwalds are a comfortable 20 points clear of Daniel Brookes and Gavan Gray in the Ducatus Property BAT in the overall standings. After failing to finish the opening race of the season, Brookes and Gray have put together two solid races, including a maiden podium, to go three points clear of Class P leaders John Thomson and Maurice Zermatten in a Zarco.

Fifth in the overall stakes are Capetonians Derick du Toit and Craig Gray (CRC BAT) who missed the opening race. They trail Thomson/Zermatten by three points and are two clear of newcomers Arthur Barnes and Anthony Usher (BAT) who also failed to finish the Mooi River race.

Class A sees the du Plessis and Sullwald combination leading Brookes/Gray, du Toit/Gray and Barnes/Usher. The likes of Hutchison/Stassen and Gibson/Campbell have slipped off the radar and will be desperate for good results on the Toyota Kalahari Botswana 1000 Desert Race – which carries double points – to revive their title challenges.

Reliability problems for other crews have also propelled Swaziland based driver Thomson and Zermatten into a commanding lead in Class P. The pair are the only Class P crew with a 100 percent record this season.

Two successive wins have helped Thomson to a healthy 24 point lead over veteran Rob Wark in the driver stakes. Wark, however, alternates driving duties in the K9 Racing Aceco with Jeremy Woods, and that hands Thomson a distinct advantage.

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KZN driver James Watson (BAT) trails Wark by seven points with John Telford and Nic Goslar next up. Among the co-drivers Wark's navigator, another veteran in Ashley Thorn, is in second place with John Thompson, who sits alongside Watson, in third place.

The next event on the Donaldson Cross Country Championship calendar is the Toyota Kalahari Botswana 1000 Desert Race in Jwaneng, Botswana from June 27 to 29.

Ends

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