



## **GILT EDGED OPPORTUNITY FOR TEAM CASTROL TOYOTA HILUX PAIR Taylor and Murphy take comfortable lead to Force Fuel 450 at Sun City**

Reigning Production Vehicle champions Anthony Taylor and Dennis Murphy have a gilt edged opportunity to tighten their hold on winning back to back titles when they line up for the Force Fuel 450, round five of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, at Sun City on August 8 and 9.

Wins on the RFS 450 and the Nkomazi 450, along with a 50 point haul at the Toyota 1000 Desert Race in Botswana, have given the Team Castrol Toyota Hilux factory pair commanding championship leads in both the overall and premier Class T categories. Taylor and Murphy are 28 points clear of brothers Johan and Werner Horn, the surprise package of the season, in the Malalane Toyota Hilux.

A string of podium finishes in their first season in Class T has lifted the Horns, ironically campaigning the Toyota Hilux in which Taylor/Murphy won last year's championship, two points clear of Manfred Schroder and Japie Badenhorst in the works Atlas Copco Ford Racing Ranger. A tight situation is completed by Leeroy Poulter and Rob Howie, who are only a further three points adrift in the second of the Team Castrol Toyota Hilux entries.

The factory Team Castrol Toyota Hilux and Atlas Copco Ford Racing crews will carry most of the smart money. The Sun City event, however, following closely on the marathon Toyota 1 00 Desert Race is prone to producing surprises.

A mid season burst of four wins in a row set Taylor/Murphy on the way winning last year's championship with a race to spare. A win on the Force Fuel 450 would put them well on the way to a repeat performance.

The Horns, the team of the season so far, have had a fairytale run of results. They are being chased by three factory teams in Poulter/Howie, Schroder/Badenhorst and Gary Bertholdt/Siegfried Rousseau, in the second Atlas Copco Ford Racing Ranger, and one wonders how much longer the brothers can keep everything together.

Bertholdt and Rousseau, fifth in the championship, trail Taylor and Murphy by 50 points – the equivalent of two wins – and time is running out for them. Much the same can be said of the rest of the Production Vehicle championship runners, but there are some enticing clashes that add a little extra flavour to the Sun City mix.

Only one point separates Regent Racing Nissan Navara team-mates Terence Marsh and Mike Whitehouse. What makes their little cameo all the more enticing is that both will be accompanied by Imperial Auto Celebrity series co-drivers.

Marsh will be accompanied by Top Billing presenter Jeanie D, while Whitehouse will have former Springbok rugby captain and Sharks franchise chief executive officer John Smit sitting alongside him. It is the first celebrity 'double header' since the series was launched at the same race in 2011, and both teams will be watched with interest.

A number of other crews will be looking at top five or top 10 results. Among them are Johan van Staden/Mike Lawrenson (Atlas Copco Nissan Navara), Christiaan du Plooy/Henk Janse van Vuuren (RFS Ford Ranger), Hennie de Klerk/Johann Smalberger (Treasury One BMW X3) and youngsters Jason Venter and Vince van Alleman in the 4x4 Mega World Toyota Hilux.

After the Toyota 1000 Desert Race, the Bloemfontein pair of Louw de Bruin and Riaan Greyling in the diesel powered Ruwacon Ford Ranger, have gone back to the top of the Class S championship for cars up to four litres with solid axle rear suspension. They have a comfortable 22 point lead over former leaders Deon Venter/Ian

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Palmer (4x4 Mega World Toyota Hilux) and veteran former South African champions Jannie Visser and Joks le Roux in the Ruwaccon Toyota Hilux.

After missing an event earlier in the season, Visser and le Roux bagged a full-house of 50 points in Botswana and rocketed back into championship contention. The pair will be relishing another taste of North West province conditions and will have plenty of support.

A fair slice of the Class S attention, however, will be on the husband and wife crew of Marius and Jolinda Fourie who, after missing a couple of events, switch from the Special Vehicle category and join the Production Vehicle brigade in the PHB Toyota Hilux. The Fouries were consistently among the frontrunners in the Special Vehicle category, and it will be interesting to see how they adapt to the Toyota Hilux.

Others to watch in Class S include Archie Rutherford/Gerhard Schutte (Regent Racing Nissan Navara) and Luke Botha and highly experienced Andre Vermeulen, in the Force Fuel Toyota Hilux who is equally at home in a cross country or rally car. There is plenty of quality in Class S, and some competitive racing is a foregone conclusion.

Class D will be a two horse race. Impressive newcomers Dewald and Anton Nienaber will take on Diederik Hattingh and Johann du Toit in a Toyota Land Cruiser and Dana Vos and Louis Janse van Vuuren in the Toyota versus Ford battle.

An interesting situation has also developed in Class G, or the Side by Side category, where only six points separate the two top teams. A rich haul of points on the Toyota 1000 Desert Race has seen KwaZulu-Natal crew Gareth Woolridge and Boyd Dreyer (Polaris) close to within six points of championship leaders Brian Capper and Jaco Swart in the Regent Racing Polaris.

They will be chased by Leander Pienaar and Carl Swanepoel (Motorite Can-Am Maverick) who won the inaugural Class G race at the RFS 450. Also in the mix will be Werner Mostert and Denzel Shriver in the Moto-Netix Polaris.

As has become customary, the Force Fuel 450 at Sun City will be run in conjunction with a round of the Northern Regions Cross Country Championship. The qualifying race to determine grid positions will start at 11:30 on Friday, August 8, and the race at 8:00 on Saturday, August 9.

Race headquarters, the start/finish and the designated service park will all be situated at the Sun City complex with free public entry to these areas. The route is again spectator friendly with numerous spectator points within easy access from race headquarters, and public entry into these areas is also free of charge.

Ends

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