



PRODUCTION VEHICLE LEADERS TAYLOR/MURPHY WIN FORCE FUEL 450 QUALIFYING RACE AT SUN CITY

Sun City, Friday – Reigning champions and current Production Vehicle leaders Anthony Taylor and Dennis Murphy were given a run for their money on the way to winning the qualifying race for the Force Fuel 450, round five of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, here today.

Taylor and Murphy (Castrol Toyota Hilux), after bagging a full house of 50 points by winning both legs of the recent Toyota 1000 Desert Race in Botswana, continued their good form – but squeaked the win by the narrowest of margins. The factory pair were just five seconds ahead of Mpumalanga brothers Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux), who continued with their fairytale start to life in the premier Class T category.

Taylor/Murphy and the Horns go into this weekend's race leading the overall championship ahead of the works Atlas Copco Ford Racing Ranger pair of Manfred Schroder and Japie Bezuidenhout. The Ford crew's title hopes were not improved by a broken suspension that will see them start tomorrow's race from the back of the field.

There was, however, better news for the second Atlas Copco Ford Racing pair of Gary Bertholdt and Siegfried Rousseau. Bertholdt and Rousseau, who won a free entry into next year's Dakar Rally by winning the Dakar Challenge in Botswana, grabbed the final place on the podium by finishing ahead of Rustenburg crew Willem Vos and Werner Weiss in the Vossies BMW X3.

"We had one or two little incidents, but nothing serious," said Murphy. "The car was good so hopefully we can keep the momentum going and build on our championship lead."

The Horns, in the car in which Taylor/Murphy won last year's championship, also reported a "clean run." The Malalane Toyota, however, was going to need some overnight panel beating.

"We hit a tree and destroyed a panel on the right hand side of the vehicle," said Werner. "It's nothing serious but today's route was very fast, and there is going to be dust tomorrow."

Bertholdt/Rousseau were more than a minute clear of Vos and Weiss who were the first of the Class S cars under four litres and with solid rear axle suspension. After winning last year's Atlas Copco Gold 400, and exploiting local knowledge, a top five finish for Vos and Weiss can hardly be called a surprise.

The Rustenburg pair were around three minutes clear of Christiaan du Plooy and Henk Janse van Vuuren (RFS Ford Ranger), with the ever steady Johan van Staden and Mike Lawrenson sixth in the Atlas Copco Nissan Navara. A few eyebrows were raised when Mike Whitehouse and former Springbok rugby captain John Smit (Regent Racing Nissan Navara) came in just 11 seconds behind the Atlas Copco crew.

A tight battle was completed when Jannie Visser and Joks le Roux (Ruwacon Racing Toyota Hilux) finished only five seconds behind Whitehouse and Smit. The North West crew were the second of the Class S runners with championship leaders Louw de Bruyn and Riaan Greyling, in the diesel powered Ruwacon Ford Ranger, in third place.

Smit and Top Billing presenter Jeannie D are competing in the Imperial Auto Celebrity Challenge, with the TV star sitting alongside Terence Marsh in a second Regent Racing Nissan Navara. The pair finished a creditable 11th overall with Smit remarking afterwards that practise outings were "totally different" to race conditions.

"John was very calm in the car," said Whitehouse. "We had a good run and hopefully we will go just as well in the race."

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The Class G, or Side by Side, honours went to Leander Pienaar and Carl Swanepoel (Can-Am Maverick) who won the inaugural race for the category earlier in the season. They came in ahead of championship leaders Brian Capper and Jaco Swart (Regent Racing Polaris) with Toyota Desert Race winners Gareth Woolridge and Boyd Dreyer third in another Polaris.

Race headquarters, the ceremonial start/finish and the designated service point are all located at the Sun City complex. Public entry to these areas and spectator points along the route is free of charge, and the race will start at 8:00 .

Ends

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