



DAVID AND GOLIATH PRODUCTION VEHICLE BATTLE AT VRYBURG 450 Only three points separate top teams in Donaldson Cross Country Championship

With only three points separating the two top teams in the championship the Production Vehicle category at the Vryburg 450 on September 12 and 13, round six of the Donaldson Cross Country Championship, is going to be full of tension.

Reigning champions Anthony Taylor and Dennis Murphy, in the factory Team Castrol Toyota Hilux, take to the North West a slender three point lead in the overall championship, and a four point lead in the Class T battle. It is a David and Goliath story with Taylor/Murphy just holding off Mpumalanga brothers Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux), who have surprised all and sundry in their rookie year in the premier Class T category.

There is, however, a twist in the tail that provides a major dollop of added intrigue to the championship situation. Teams have to drop one score at the end of the season, and with two non finishes so far, Taylor and Murphy are sailing pretty close to the wind.

It has been an all or nothing season for Taylor and Murphy – four wins interspersed with a pair of ‘did not finish’ entries in the results column – and another non finish, or a poor result, could see their quest for back to back titles run aground. The Horns, by contrast, have a 100 percent finish record, with the cross country fraternity waiting for the law of averages to catch up with a team that has hardly put a wheel wrong all season.

The Horns have a 15 point advantage over Leeroy Poulter and Rob Howie in the second of the Team Castrol Toyota Hilux entries, who have mixed four podium places with some indifferent results and another did not finish won't do their cause any good.

Behind Poulter/Howie the two Atlas Copco Ford Racing crews of Manfred Schroder/Japie Badenhorst and Gary Bertholdt/Siegfried Rousseau are separated by a lone point. That situation, however, is academic with the return to action of former South African champion Chris Visser who again links up with Badenhorst. Visser has been out of action with a neck injury suffered on the Dakar Rally, and is likely to be a little ring rusty.

For Bertholdt and Rousseau the stakes are high. They have a 100 percent finish record this season, and a good Vryburg result could do wonders for their title challenge.

There are a number of crews who are also on pretty thin ice as the season enters the home stretch. However, with two of the classes consistent performers out of the picture Jason Venter/ Vincent van Allerman (4x4 Mega World Toyota Hilux) and Hennie de Klerk/Johann Smalberger (RFS/Treasury One BMW X3) are both under pressure with two non finishes while Christiaan du Plooy and Henk Janse van Vuuren (RFS Ford Ranger) will be looking to restore some pride after three retirements.

The steady Van Staden and Lawrenson will not be competing at the Vryburg 450 and could miss the rest of the season unless they find a replacement vehicle for the Atlas Copco Nissan Navara that is being readied for the Dakar Rally in January, while Whitehouse/Myburgh will spend the remainder of the season in class S after their Regent Racing V8 Nissan Navara was sold to an overseas buyer for the 2015 Dakar Rally early next year.

It is only natural, however, that most of the attention will be focussed on the battles between the factory teams and the Horns who have bloodied a few noses.

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There will also be a touch of glamour to proceedings with actress Hlubi Mboya competing in the Imperial Auto Celebrity Challenge with Regent Racing team principal Terence Marsh. TV personality Jeannie Dee and rugby star John Smit co-driving with Whitehouse bagging top 10 finishes on the recent Force Fuel 450.

Class S for cars under four litres with solid axle rear suspension, is also delicately poised with Ruwacou Racing team-mates Louw de Bruin and Riaan Greyling (Ford Ranger TDCi) and veteran former South African champions Jannie Visser and Joks le Roux in a Toyota Hilux. Bloemfontein based de Bruin and Greyling have a 100 percent finish record but, despite a non finish and missing one event, a run of good form has taken Visser/le Roux to within nine points of the Free State pair.

Visser and le Roux were brought up just down the road from Vryburg, and will fancy their chances in familiar surroundings. Deon Venter, now partnered by Jaco van Aardt in the 4x4 Mega World Toyota Hilux, is also on thin ice after two non finishes while Archie Rutherford and Gerhard Schutte (Regent Racing Nissan Navara) and Pieter Ruthven/Hansie Rheeder (Ruwacou Toyota Hilux) have some ground to make up.

The Class S ranks have also been bolstered by Willem Vos/Werner Weiss (Vossies BMW X3) and Special Vehicle converts Marius and Jolinda Fourie in the PHB Toyota Hilux. Vos/Weiss have a national overall win to their credit, while the Fouries will be finding their feet in new surroundings.

The new Class G category – also known as Side by Side – has also developed into a tense affair among the two top drivers. Only a single point separates Brian Capper (Regent Racing Polaris) from Pietermaritzburg youngster Gareth Woolridge (NWM Polaris) who has chalked up three wins in a row,

Boyd Dreyer, who took over from Simon Harrison as Woolridge's co-driver, has moved into second position – behind Jaco Swart who sits alongside Capper – among the navigators. Stephan Marais is third among the co-drivers but it is the Capper/Woolridge scrap that will be watched with interest.

Race headquarters, the start/finish and the designated service park will all be located at the Vryburg Motor Club, with free public access to these areas and spectator points along the route. The Vryburg 450 will also run in conjunction with a round of the Northern Regions Cross Country Championship.

The qualifying event to determine race grid positions will start at 11:30 on September 12, and the race at 8:00 the following day.

Ends

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