

## A MIXED BAG OF FORTUNES FOR LEADERS AND CHASERS AT WINDY HARRISMITH 400 QUALIFIER

There was bad luck for some of the leaders and title chasers at the exceptionally windy qualifying race of the Harrismith 400, the fifth and penultimate round of the South African Cross Country Championship that takes place from the Eeram Farmers Complex this weekend. It will be a long day for those teams chasing from the back tomorrow, but the windy conditions will be a welcome relief as the dust could be problematic.

In the Production Vehicle category, the defending champion and overall leaders, Giniel de Villiers/Dennis Murphy (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux) only managed three kilometres of the 39.5km Qualifying Race when a broken tie-rod forced them to retire. Their team-mates, Henk Lategan/Barry White, who won the previous event at Bronkhorstspuit, posted the fastest time and will be opening the road on Saturday.

They were, however, only 24 seconds faster than the local team of Jacques van Tonder/Sammy Redelinghuys (Ford Ranger) who were also the fastest in Class T. "We had an incredible run today," Van Tonder said after the race. "It was our best run so far this year and we hope that it lasts through the day tomorrow," the local driver said. It was also a good day in the Speedglas BMW X3 office for Richard Leeke/Danie Stassen who were a mere 13 seconds slower than the local team.

The youngsters will be chased by Chris Visser/Philip Herselman (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) who were only one second behind after a wrong-slot cost them valuable time. They are second in the FIA Class behind the leading Toyota of Lategan/White and six seconds ahead of Brian Baragwanath who has teamed up with motorcycle racing legend, Joey Evans in the Century Racing CR 5 for the Harrismith 400.

Evans was introduced into the SACCS at Bronkhorstspuit when he read the notes for Terence Marsh (Red-Lined Motorsport Nissan Navara) and is continuing his adventure sitting next to the former multiple SA national cross-country quad champion for the Free State event. The two Dakar Rally heroes had fun with Baragwanath describing the qualifying route almost like 'motocross on four wheels'. They are third in the FIA Class, only six seconds slower than Visser/Herselman and nine seconds faster than the Century Racing CR 6 of Mark Corbett/Juan Möhr who 'took it easy' during the qualifying event.

The NWM Ford Ranger pair of Lance Woolridge/Ward Huxtable will start in third place in Class T and seventh in the Production Vehicle category after posting a time just 11 seconds slower than Corbett/Möhr.

Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dreyer (NWM Ford Ranger) also found the route quite slippery and qualified seven seconds behind their team-mates. They will be the eighth vehicle off the start line in the Production Vehicle category with only six seconds separating them from Johan van Staden/Mike Lawrenson (Elf Renault Duster). Jason Venter/Jaco van Aardt (4x4 Mega World ARB Toyota Hilux) are 10<sup>th</sup> with the Horn brothers, Johan and Werner (Malalane Toyota Hilux) 11<sup>th</sup> after opening the slippery, but fast route today. The Horn brothers are the defending Class T champions and they will have to continue their title battle with Lance Woolridge/Huxtable from a short distance on Saturday and will be hoping for the wind to ease the dust.

After claiming their first Class T victory in front of their Atlas Copco sponsors at Bronkhorstspuit last month, Gary Bertholdt/Geoff Minnitt (Toyota Hilux) will have their work cut out for them as they will be the last Production Vehicle team off the line due to mechanical problems forcing them out of the qualifying event. Their outing was marred by a broken differential at the 19km mark and a broken prop shaft five kilometres further after engaging diff-lock.

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Jannie Visser and his son, Chris will be leading Class S in their Toyota Hilux with the class leaders, David Huddy/Gerhard Schutte (Nissan Navara) third in class behind Archie Rutherford and his son Kent (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) although Pieter van Wyk read the notes for him during the qualifying race.

Marsh and the UK motorcycle rider and multiple Dakar Rally finisher, Lyndon Poskitt, who competes in cross-country races in various countries while travelling the world on his motorcycle, are seventh in the FIA Class. Sitting next to Marsh in the Class FIA Navara is a first for Poskitt and according to Marsh, the likable adventurer was right on the mark all the time.

In the Special Vehicle category, an alternator that was not charging did not keep Lance Trethewey/Adriaan Roets (LT Earthmovers BAT Venom) from posting the fastest time after just 39.5 kilometres. They were 24 seconds ahead of André and Ralph Voigts (Voigts Group BAT Venom) in only their second national event this season. Both Trethewey/Roets and the Voigts' are not contenders for the titles, but good results on their side can cause an upset in the standings.

A penalty relegated the overall winners of the Atlas Copco 400, Stefan van Pletzen/Jaco Pieterse (Live Lesotho Chenoweth) down to the back of the field and they will have to fight their way back if they would like to finish on the podium. Team-mates, Werner Kennedy/CJ van Pletzen (Porter) were only 37 seconds slower than the Voigts and will be the third Special Vehicle team off the line in the morning.

The current leaders, Coetzee Labuscagne and his daughter, Sandra Labuscagne-Jonck (4x4 Mega World ARB Porter) were fourth fastest, 17 seconds behind Kennedy/Van Pletzen and will keep their focus on the finish line in order to bag more valuable points towards their title chase. John Telford/Victor Ntsekhe (BAT Warbird) are chasing them in the Class A standings and will continue to do so at Harrismith. They posted a time only 25 seconds slower than the class leaders and will keep their eye on the scoreboard at this penultimate round of the 2018 SACCS.

Keith Makenete/Ntaote Bereng (BAT Spec 2) will be leading the Class P field and will hope that their clutch problems are something of the past. They will be starting just behind Van Pletzen/Pieterse and ahead of Nic Goslar/Joe Lima (SA Clinics Zarco Magnum) with Goslar aiming for the Class P driver's title.

Nico du Rand/Henry Köhne (Can-Am) will be leading the Side-by-Side Interprovincial Challenge and will be followed by Werner Mostert/JG Claassen (Can-Am Maverick X3 XRS) with Ernest Roberts/Stuart Creevy (Can-Am Maverick) third.

On Saturday, racing will start at 08:00 when the leading vehicle departs on the 170km loop to be repeated twice. All the action will happen from the Eeram Farmers Complex on the outskirts of Harrismith.

Cross country enthusiasts can follow the Harrismith 400 by downloading the RallySafe App for free of charge for iOS and Android devices.

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