

NEW LEADERS IN PRODUCTION VEHICLE CATEGORY AS CHAMPIONSHIP BATTLES GO DOWN TO THE WIRE

A whole lot of shuffling took place after the recent Harrismith 400, the fifth and penultimate round of the 2018 South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS) and the Production Vehicle championship has a new look that predicts a tooth and nail fight for the titles at the sixth and final round.

While all is not lost for those who dropped a position or two in the standings, competitors who moved up, will be confident and hopeful to continue their performances. The fight for the titles will go down to the wire at the season finale and everyone will feel the pressure to do well and claim every single point they can lay their hands on.

Defending champions Giniel de Villiers and Dennis Murphy (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux) were hit by bad luck and after not being able to complete the last two events, they retain their position as the overall leaders, but team-mates Henk Lategan/Barry White overtook them in the FIA Class title chase. Lategan the new leader in the FIA Class drivers' championship leads De Villiers by eight points with the Harrismith winner, Chris Visser (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) third, 19 points adrift.

While Lategan trails De Villiers in the overall drivers' standings by 10 points, navigators White and Murphy are now on equal points in the overall standings as White only took his place next to Lategan from the second round of the season. White has also taken the lead in the FIA Class navigators' championship with Murphy eight points behind him and Herselman a mere four points in arrears and within striking range of the title. The battle for this title will indeed be one to keep a close eye on at the final event.

In the hotly contested Class T, leaders Lance Woolridge/Ward Huxtable (NWM Ford Ranger) would have liked a fourth victory to strengthen their lead ahead of the defending champions, Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux), but it was not meant to be and their team-mates, Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dryer claimed their first victory of the season at the Harrismith 400. Their victory elevated them onto the Class T podium and from their current third place, they have a foot in the door for the title as they are only five points behind the Horn brothers.

At the front of the pack, a mere nine points separate the leaders Lance Woolridge/Huxtable from the Horn brothers who were plagued by mechanical issues at the recent event. After claiming the class victory at the Atlas Copco 400 in Bronkhorstspuit and moving onto the Class T podium, Gary Bertholdt/Geoff Minnitt (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) dropped off the podium after the recent Free State race. They are now fourth albeit only three points behind the class winners (Woolridge/Dryer) and the battle for the final podium position will also be an exciting one to watch.

With a blanket of only 17 points covering the first four teams in the Class T championships, teams will feel the pressure and there will be no room for error at the season finale in November.

David Huddy/Gerhard Schutte (Nissan Navara) have been a model of consistency in Class S and deserve the title. They have opened a gap of 30 points to second-placed Jannie Visser and son Chris (Toyota Hilux) who could not finish the Harrismith 400. The Visser father and son team are second and could finish the season in the runner-up position if they keep Heinie Strumpher/Henri Hugo (4x4 Mega World ARB Toyota Hilux) at bay as only three points currently separate them.

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While the battles for the class championships will continue at the final round of the season, competitors will also do their utmost to finish in the best overall position possible. Looking at the current situation in the overall drivers' standings, the battle between the Toyota Gazoo Racing SA team-mates, De Villiers and Lategan will continue while Visser will be ready and able to defend his third place, he will also have to keep an eye on Lance Woolridge who is fourth and only five points behind him. Johan Horn and Bertholdt are equal on points and only 12 points further adrift with Gareth Woolridge trailing them by 11 points.

In the overall navigators' standings, Murphy and White have locked horns on the same amount of points at the front and while they will continue their battle, they will have to keep their sights on Herselman who is only seven points adrift. Herselman is in the same tricky situation in the fight for the title and can't lose sight of Huxtable who would like nothing more than to finish the season on the podium. Huxtable trails Herselman by a mere five points. Twelve points behind Huxtable, Horn and Minnitt are level on points while Dreyer is 11 points further behind.

The battle for the coveted Manufacturers Award, is led by Toyota with Ford second and Nissan in third place. Century Racing is fourth followed by Renault, BMW and Volkswagen.

The final round of the championship, the Gold 400, takes place on 2 and 3 November at the Kloof Recreation Club at Glenharvie in Westonaria.

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