

AN EXPERIENCED FIELD OF TEAMS IN SPECIAL VEHICLE CATEGORY TO TACKLE MPUMALANGA 400

An experienced field of teams in the Special Vehicle category will take on the Mpumalanga 400, the opening round of the 2019 South African Cross Country Series (SACCS) that takes place on 15 and 16 March from the scenic town of Dullstroom in Mpumalanga. Experience combined with a few role changes and some new combinations predict an exciting season of Cross Country racing.

Add to that new and revamped racing equipment with the latest technology and a battle for national championship titles in the Side x Side Class and the Mpumalanga 400 becomes a season opener not to miss.

After clinching the overall and Class A titles for the very first time, things are looking somewhat different for the father and daughter combination of Coetzee Labuscagne and Sandra Labuscagne-Jonck. Coetzee recently suffered a major heart attack that required a triple by-pass. With Coetzee and Sandra receiving top honours in the Special Vehicle category last year and Coetzee reaching his target of competing in more than a 100 national cross country events, his recent health woes hastened his promotion to manager of the Team Total Agri Porter.

It was always part of the plan for Sandra to move into the driver seat at some stage as it would be a natural progression and now is the time to do so. She and husband Jaco have competed in various club and regional rallies as well as in the 2017 Gold 400 SACCS national where they finished just off the podium. Jaco was also the stand-in navigator for Coetzee when Sandra was abroad competing in international FIA events while he also navigated for multiple Special Vehicle champion, Giel Nel. He has been part of the technical team for the last eight years and brings valuable experience and technical knowledge into the Porter cabin.

Like the Labuscagne's, the extremely consistent team of John Telford and Victor Ntsekhe will also be back in action in the Calcamite BAT Warbird in Class A. After a nail biting battle for the titles and having to settle for the runner-up positions missing out by only a handful of points, Telford/Ntsekhe aim to be as consistent in their fight for the 2019 championship titles.

Lance Trethewey/Adriaan Roets (LT Earthmovers BAT Venom) ended the 2018 season on a high as they won both the final two rounds of the SACCS. They missed the Mpumalanga 400 last year and the event will be all new to them, but the memories of their last victories will still be fresh and an extra motivation to start the season on the right foot.

The Voigts, André and Ralph competed only twice during 2018 and not only won at their first attempt, but also finished on the podium again in their second outing. This year the roles will change with Ralph now behind the wheel of the BAT Venom while André will read the notes. They will also tackle the Mpumalanga 400 for the first time and will hope for lots of seat time and some silverware before the following event on home turf in KwaZulu-Natal.

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The 2018 season was one that Swaziland's John Thomson and navigator Maurice Zermatten (Zarco Challenger) would rather forget although their victory on the second day of the Toyota Kalahari Botswana 1000 Desert Race made up for quite a few disappointments during the rest of the season. The experienced duo are looking forward to the season and if previous performances are anything to go by, they might just spring a few surprises.

Dean Bradbury is also back for more cross country racing action with his BAT Viper and sitting next to him reading the notes, will be Rikus Hattingh. This team are probably the dark horses in Class A, but if they produce the goods, they can walk away with lots of points and even some silverware.

The Class A challenge is not the same without the two enthusiastic Tyre Rack teams of Taahir and Thala Moosajee in the Stryker and Rayhaan Bodhanya this year joined by son Lais in the Porter. Taahir and Thala have also swapped roles with Taahir doing the driving and Thala finding the road.

Action packed racing can be expected in the Side x Side Class that has been awarded national championship status and with the names of the defending champions not on the entry list for the Mpumalanga 400, a brand new battle is on the cards. Werner Mostert (Can-Am Maverick) was the runner-up in the drivers' standings last year and has teamed up with brother, Leon, who will read the notes.

Peter Walter and navigator Shaun de Villiers (Can-Am Maverick) rounded off the podium at the end of the 2018 season and the team will aim for more good results, like their second place at the Mpumalanga 400 last year. Gerry van der Byl might be a new name in the SACCS circles, but this motorcycle rider from Knysna completed the Dakar Rally in 2018 despite many odds and plans to go back in 2020. He will participate in the SxS Class and in the SACCS for the very first time.

The Mpumalanga 400 will start on Friday, 15 March at 13:30 with a 67km qualifying race from the Village Green Cricket Oval. The results will determine the starting order for the race on Saturday, 16 March that starts at 08:30 from the cricket oval where the finish will also be after teams have completed two laps of 161km that make up the main race. Race headquarters as well as the designated service park (DSP) will also be situated at the cricket oval where refreshments will be available throughout the event.

Entrance to the Village Green Cricket Oval as well as various vantage points on the route, is free of charge.

SACCS enthusiasts can follow the Mpumalanga 400 on the RallySafe App available to be downloaded free of charge for iOS and Android devices.