

## GINIEL DE VILLIERS/DENNIS MURPHY VICTORIOUS AT LICHTENBURG 400

The tide turned for the defending Production Vehicle champions, Giniel de Villiers/Dennis Murphy (Toyota Gazoo Racing Hilux) who finally got the monkey off their back when they won the Lichtenburg 400, the fifth and penultimate round of the South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS) that took place this weekend in the North-West Province.

It was, however, not a walk in the park as dust and a demanding route challenged the teams who were all making the most of the opportunity to compete in the same event as double F1 champion, Fernando Alonso and multiple Dakar Rally motorcycle winner, Marc Coma, who tackled their first ever cross country race.

Suffering from a cold did not make it easier for De Villiers who last claimed a race victory at the season opener. The pair had to battle it out with team-mates, Henk Lategan/Brett Cummings who are also the current overall and FIA Class leaders. Lategan/Cummings started the race from pole position after posting the fastest time during the Qualifying Race on Friday, but an early mistake where they went the wrong way through a gate, cost them valuable time. They finished second and trailed their team-mates by just under 10 minutes.

A mere 33 seconds was all the current Class T leaders, Lance Woolridge/Ward Huxtable (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) needed to take yet another class win, but a second place was enough for the defending champions to secure the 2019 Class T championship with one race remaining. The Class T victory went to Jason Venter/Jaco van Aardt (4x4 Mega World ARB Toyota Hilux) who also finished third overall in the Production Vehicle category. They were followed by Woolridge/Huxtable with Richard Leeke/Zaheer Bodhanya (Red-Lined Motorsport Nissan Navara) rounding off the FIA Class podium behind the two Toyota Gazoo Racing Hilux teams. This is Leeke's best result to date.

They were only six seconds faster than Gary Bertholdt/Geoff Minnitt (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) who rounded off the Class T podium after posting the fastest time in the class at the Qualifying Race.

A vibration on the vehicle forced Chris Visser/Danie Stassen (Atlas Copco Toyota Hilux) to replace a propshaft after the first loop. They finished fourth in the FIA Class and were only 17 seconds ahead of the Brazilian team of Marcos Baumgart/Kleber Cincea (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) who finished fourth in Class T.

A blanket of 30 seconds covered the four teams from Visser/Stassen in seventh place to Shameer Variawa/Juan Möhr (Toyota Gazoo Racing Hilux) who were 10<sup>th</sup> overall after also struggling in the dust of fellow competitors. In between Jacques van Tonder/Boyd Dreyer (Ford Ranger) finished nine seconds behind the Brazilians and four seconds ahead of Variawa/Möhr. They were fifth in Class T while the Toyota Gazoo Racing team finished fifth in the FIA Class.

The Horn brothers, Johan and Werner (Malalane Toyota Hilux) finished just outside the overall top 10 in 11<sup>th</sup> place and were sixth in Class T. They were 39 seconds ahead of Clint Weston/Riaan Greyling (Schalk Burger Motorsport King Price Extreme) with the track and rally racing star (Weston) finishing his second ever cross

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country race after two starts. Experienced competitor, Mark Corbett and Rodney Burke (Century Racing CR6) made a comeback to the SACCS after a huge crash last year. They finished 13<sup>th</sup> overall and just behind fellow Class FIA competitors Weston/Greyling and 18 seconds ahead of another FIA Class team, the father and son combination of Johan and Sean van Staden (Elf Renault Duster).

The Van Stadens lost power steering early in the race and struggled in the tight sections, but the family were really happy finishing their first full event together. Ernest Roberts/Henry Köhne (Red-Lined Motorsport Nissan Navara) were 15<sup>th</sup> overall and ninth in the FIA Class.

Schalk Burger/Elvene Vonk (Schalk Burger Motorsport King Price Extreme) finished 10<sup>th</sup> in the FIA Class and were followed by the Class S champions, David Huddy/Gerhard Schutte who had an eventful day. The gearshift of their Nissan Navara broke on the first loop and after it was fixed at DSP, it came loose again. They were forced to stop for the necessary repairs and dropped a few places. They then battled with the dust and fuel starvation issues.

The Johnstone couple, Bernard and Minette finished yet another SACCS event in their Toyota Hilux and were followed by the track racing driver, Kishoor Pitamber and veteran navigator, André Vermeulen (Red-Lined Motorsport Nissan Navara) who also completed his first ever cross country event.

Teams now have seven weeks to prepare for the sixth and final round of the 2019 SACCS that takes place at Parys on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> November.