

SHAKE-UP IN THE PRODUCTION VEHICLE CATEGORY AFTER TOUGH SUGARBELT 400 PRODUCED NEW WINNERS

The Production Vehicle Category of the 2021 South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS) has a totally different look to it after a tough and challenging Sugarbelt 400, the second round of the championship that took place in the Eston / Mid Illovo area in KwaZulu-Natal recently and with new overall and class winners, combined with bad luck for others, the various points' standings have been completely shaken up.

A few scenarios that influenced the standings played itself out at the demanding Sugarbelt 400. One of these was the return of the defending FIA Class and Overall Production Vehicle Drivers' Champion, Henk Lategan (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux) to the fray. Lategan missed the opening round due to him still recovering from a shoulder operation after the Dakar Rally earlier this year. His navigator, Brett Cummings, was already up for a second set of results as he navigated stand-in driver, Guy Botterill, to a superb third place at the season opener.

Adding to this, the fact that team-mate Giniel de Villiers, who won this event in 2001, claimed the 2021 victory 20 years later with his current navigator Dennis Murphy, while a spate of bad luck hit the two Ford Castrol Cross Country Team Rangers in the hands of the Woolridge brothers. Lance and navigator Elvéne Vonk took the Mpumalanga 400 victory in March with Gareth and Boyd Dreyer opening their score-card with a credible third, however, both teams were unable to complete their local event and a situation was created where teams are not necessarily filling the same spot on the various points' tables.

New Overall Leaders

After finishing as runners-up at the Mpumalanga 400 in Dullstroom, the defending Class T champions, Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux) came home in third place overall behind the two leading Class FIA Toyota's of winners De Villiers/Murphy and Lategan/Cummings. This elevated the brothers into the overall lead in the Production Vehicle Category (41 points), but behind them things are looking a bit different.

The victory for De Villiers/Murphy rocketed De Villiers from sixth to second place in the Overall Drivers' Championship where he now trails Johan Horn by a single point. Murphy is, however, a single point behind both Werner Horn and Cummings who have 41 points behind their names in the Navigators' Championship.

Looking at the rest of the top 10 in the Overall Drivers' Championship, Lance Woolridge (30 points) is still on the podium and is 10 points behind De Villiers while he leads fourth-placed Lategan (23 points) by seven points. Botterill (18 points) is currently fifth with Ernest Roberts (Red-Lined Motorsport VK56) sixth (17 points) after a punishing event where he started the main race from the back of the field.

He is, however, only two points ahead of four drivers who all have 15 points in the bag – Gareth Woolridge (seventh); Mark Corbett (Century Racing CR 6) in eighth; Malcolm Kock (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) in ninth place and Brian Baragwanath (Century Racing CR 6) who was fourth at the Sugarbelt 400, in tenth.

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In the Overall Navigators' Championship, Vonk (30 points) dropped off the podium and is now fourth albeit within reach of Horn, Cummings and Murphy. She has a healthy margin over Roberts' navigator, Henry Köhne (17 points) and leads him by 13 points. Köhne finds himself in the same situation as his driver (Roberts) as four navigators, all with the same amount of points, trail him by only two points – Dreyer is sixth; Corbett's navigator, Rodney Burke is seventh; Malcolm Kock's son and navigator, Frans, is eighth and Baragwanath's new navigator, Leonard Cremer, is ninth. Nico Swartz, who sat next to Chris Visser in the Toyota Hilux for their first event of the season, rounds off the top 10 with 12 points. Visser (12 points) is just outside the top 10 in the Overall Drivers' Championship and is 11th.

De Villiers and Cummings Lead FIA Class

Competitors receive a five point bonus for starting an event in the FIA and T Classes of the Championship and this adds to the standings looking somewhat different. In the FIA Class Drivers' Championship, the victory for De Villiers pushed him into the lead (52 points) with Lance Woolridge (40 points) second and Roberts (33 points) rounding off the podium. Corbett (29 points) is fourth, only one point ahead of Botterill who level pegs with Gareth Woolridge in sixth place; Baragwanath in seventh and Lategan, who has only competed once, is eighth. Johan van Staden (Moto-Netix KEC Racing Renault Duster) is ninth with 26 points and Dewald van Breda (CR 5) is 10th with the same amount of points (22) as Conrad Rautenbach (Red-Lined Motorsport VK56) who could not complete the season opener, but was fifth with his navigator, Riaan Greyling, at the Sugarbelt 400.

In the FIA Class Navigators' Championship, Cummings is leading with 56 points, Murphy (52 points) is second and Vonk (40 points) stepping onto the podium in third place. Köhne (33 points) is fourth; Burke (29 points) is fifth, only one point ahead of Dreyer with Johan van Staden's son and navigator, Sean, seventh (26 points) and Cremer (23 points) eighth having taken over the reins from Taye Perry, who partnered Baragwanath for the past few races including the season opener.

Van Breda's navigator, Johan du Toit and Greyling both have 22 points and round off the top 10.

Horn Brothers Control Class T

The Horn brothers are still in control of the Class T Championship and have opened up a gap of 14 points to the Kock pairing (56 points) in second place. Wors Prinsloo and André Vermeulen (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) have scored consistently this season and round off the podium, trailing the Kocks by 13 points after the first two events.

Production Vehicle Category newcomers, Christo Rose/Arno Olivier, also competing in the colours of Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) have also walked away with good points after both events and are fourth (40 points) with the rest somewhat further behind.

In the Class T Drivers' Championship Bernard Johnstone (22 points) rounds off the top five after a finish at the first round, but earning only the five bonus points in KZN. Dylan Venter (4x4 Mega World ARB Toyota Hilux) has only participated in the Sugarbelt 400 and a fourth place in Class T places him sixth (20 points) while a finish and five bonus points in KZN for Ford Motorsport Development Driver, Baphumza Rubuluza (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) puts him in seventh place (15 points).

Looking at the rest of the Class T Navigators' Championship Venter's navigator, Donovan Lubbe finds himself in fifth place (20 points). He is followed by Johnstone's wife, Minette (17 points), who partnered her husband at the season opener. Rubuluza's navigator, Fanifani Meyiwa, is seventh with 15 points with the rest of the teams only scoring bonus points so far this season.

In the Manufacturers Championship, Toyota leads with 149 points followed by Ford (77 points) with Century Racing and Nissan both on 34 points. Renault has accumulated 11 points so far.

Competitors will have a third chance to gain more points when they tackle the Toyota Gazoo Racing SA (TGRSA) 1000 Desert Race on 18, 19 and 20 June in the Upington area of the Northern Cape.

Images: Nadia Jordaan [click to download](#)

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