

## SPECTACULAR RETURN TO SACCS FOR HENK LATEGAN WINNING PIRELLI QUALIFYING RACE AT SUGARBELT 400

The defending Production Vehicle Drivers' Champion, Henk Lategan (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux), made a spectacular return to the 2021 South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS) with navigator, Brett Cummings with the pair posting the fastest time for the Pirelli Qualifying Race of the Sugarbelt 400, the second round of the championship that takes place this weekend, 21 and 22 May, in the Eston / Mid Illovo area in KwaZulu-Natal.

Lategan missed the opening round as he was still recovering from a shoulder operation as a result of a crash at the Dakar Rally earlier this year, but eased back into the swing of things and the duo will start with a clear track ahead of them on Saturday morning. The 50km Pirelli Qualifying Race in the sugarcane fields was tight and challenging and time penalties for various crews shook up the initial results. When the cards fell back into place, it looked good for Toyota who claimed the top three places in the Production Vehicle Category.

Toyota Gazoo Racing SA team-mates in the FIA Class, Giniel de Villiers/Dennis Murphy are placed second (44 min 01 sec), trailing the leaders by one minute 15 seconds while the defending Class T champions, Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux) will start third (44 min 26 sec) and as the leading Class T team.

De Villiers/Murphy caught Chris Visser/Nico Swartz (FIA Class Toyota Hilux) after 25 kilometres and then lost time in their dust. The Horns experienced fuel issues and will be starting behind the leading team in the Special Vehicle Category, Lance Trethewey/Adriaan Roets (Schalk Burger Motorsport BAT) who are third overall (44 min 16 sec).

The winners of the opening round, Lance Woolridge/Elvéne Vonk (Ford Castrol Cross Country Team) finished just off the Production Vehicle Category podium and were fifth fastest overall (45 min 01 sec) while they were third in the FIA Class.

"It was not my best and I battled to find rhythm," said the local Pietermaritzburg driver, who finished third overall in the 2015 Sugarbelt 400. The team started the Qualifying Race in second place behind Brian Baragwanath/Leonard Cremer (Century Racing CR6) and found it quite tricky to be the second vehicle on the road. Baragwanath/Cremer had some bad luck as they rolled their vehicle, but it landed on its wheels and they could get going again. The unlucky team also incurred a speeding penalty and after some panel beating, they will be the 13<sup>th</sup> vehicle off the starting grid on Saturday morning.

Visser (45 min 08 sec), who also missed the season opener, and rally navigator (Swartz) were seven seconds behind Woolridge/Vonk while only six seconds separated them from the father and son team of Malcolm and Frans Kock (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) who were seventh overall and second in Class T.

Thirteen teams were slapped with speeding penalties with the two minute penalty pushing Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dreyer (Ford Castrol Cross Country Team) from posting the second fastest time to the eighth

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place overall (45 min 33 sec). Two more teams in the FIA Class, Johan and Sean van Staden (Moto-Netix KEC Racing Renault) and Mark Corbett/Rodney Burke (Century Racing CR6) round off the overall top 10.

After experiencing mechanical issues, Tim Howes/Don Thomson (Tim Drew Property Development BAT) finished second in the Special Vehicle Category (46 min 55 sec) and are 11<sup>th</sup> overall, a mere 21 seconds ahead of Wors Prinsloo/André Vermeulen (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) who round off the Class T podium despite suffering power steering issues.

There was another consistent result for newcomers Eben Basson/Gerhard Schutte (Red-Lined Motorsport VK56) whose time was the same as Baragwanath/Cremer after their penalty and Bernard Johnstone/Jan Harm Hugo (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) are 15<sup>th</sup>, 46 seconds behind the two teams ahead of them.

The Sugarbelt 400 started well for veteran competitors, John Thomson/Maurice Zermatten (Zarco) with a third place in Class A despite a loose steering wheel and them hitting a pole. They are 16<sup>th</sup> overall. The event did not start that well for the Mostert brothers, Werner and Leon in the Schalk Burger Motorsport Can-Am SxS who had a great outing to be the fastest Side-by-Side in Class G of the Special Vehicle Category. A five minute penalty resulted in them dropping from being just outside the overall top 10 to the 25<sup>th</sup> place overall (53 min 10 sec) and to the fourth team in Class G.

Theo Erasmus/Edward Odendaal (Can-Am) kept their noses clean (49 min 44 sec) and will start their first Sugarbelt 400 as the leading Class G SxS team in the 20<sup>th</sup> place overall and fifth in the Special Vehicle Category. Bazil Bezuidenhout/Rikus Hattingh (Moto-Netix KEC Racing Can-Am) finished second in Class G and sixth in the Special Vehicle Category, 38 seconds slower than the SxS leaders with Marko Himmel/Francois Schoonbee (Schalk Burger Motorsport Can-Am) rounding off the SxS podium in 23<sup>rd</sup> place overall albeit losing time with brake and electrical problems.

In the Production Vehicle Category, there was disaster for Ernest Roberts/Henry Köhne (Red-Lined Motorsport VK56) who will start the race on Saturday from the back of the field after not being able to finish the Qualifying Race. The team hit a tree stump that broke off a wheel.

In the Special Vehicle Category there was also bad luck for local racer, Clint Gibson/Alaric Smith (Dirt Sport Component Stryker) who will also have to fight their way from the back of the field. They finished 35<sup>th</sup> overall after they lost 20 minutes early in the race when they stalled in the first corner and experienced battery issues. Experienced competitor, Geoff Minnitt/Gerrie Prinsloo (Can-Am SxS) also had their fair share of excitement when they landed in a dam with Johnstone/Hugo coming to their aid and helping them out.

The Pirelli Qualifying Race determined the starting order for the race on Saturday when teams will tackle the first of two 160 kilometre loops from the Beaumont Eston Farmers' Club at 8:00. The race will also finish at the club. No spectators are allowed and enthusiasts can follow the action on the RallySafe App that is available as a free download.

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