

POWERFUL SPECIAL VEHICLES AND SIDE-BY-SIDES LOOKING FORWARD TO SANDY MARATHON DESERT RACE AT UPINGTON

The sandy conditions of the Toyota Gazoo Racing SA (TGRSA) 1000 Desert Race, the only marathon event in the South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS) and round three of the championship that takes place over three days on 18, 19 and 20 June in and around Upington in the Northern Cape, will suit the powerful two-wheel drive vehicles in the Special Vehicle Category and the teams are excited about this new event on the calendar.

The traditional Toyota 1000 Desert Race (TDR 1000) in Botswana had to be cancelled for the second consecutive year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the SACCS not crossing the Botswana border since 2019, the new TGRSA 1000 Desert Race will test the teams and their race vehicles and as this is a marathon event consisting of almost a thousand kilometres, a healthy amount of points are also up for grabs.

And while racing in the harsh sandy conditions and taking on mini dunes in the Upington area will be new to all, competitors with experience of the TDR 1000 in Botswana might just find themselves in a more comfortable position. The main aim will be to finish each of the three days and complete almost a thousand racing kilometres. The silverware will make the effort worthwhile and the points can be a game-changer with the season reaching the halfway mark.

The Road to Dakar Challenge will be incorporated in the TGRSA 1000 Desert Race with the winning privateer crew who have entered this challenge, winning a free entry to the Dakar Rally for 2022 or 2023. A cash prize of 8 000 euros has been added to the prize to assist with the necessary funding to compete in the toughest automotive race in the world.

The 2019 Overall Special Vehicle Category and Class A champions, who were also the 2019 TDR 1000 winners, Lance Trethewey and Adriaan Roets (Schalk Burger Motorsport BAT), will be looking for more of the same and it could include their third victory of the season. Trethewey/Roets seem to be untouchable so far this season, but the experienced team will still be cautious as anything can happen during the three arduous days of racing.

Their biggest opposition might be another team with many desert racing kilometres behind their names, Clint Gibson/Alaric Smith (Dirt Sport Stryker) who finished as the runners-up at the recent Sugarbelt 400. The defending champions, Tim Howes, has again teamed up with Gary Campbell (Tim Drew Property Developers BAT) and Howes will hope for a good result to put his title chase back on track.

Another team whose championship has also not taken off yet, is the Jonck crew of driver Sandra Labuscagne-Jonck and hubby Jaco (Moto-Netix KEC Racing Porter). Sandra has competed in eight TDR 1000 races and has only missed one when she was competing internationally. She has navigated for her father, Coetzee with the team winning the Special Vehicle Category in Botswana in 2018 albeit finishing on three wheels. Her experience, that includes desert racing kilometres behind the steering wheel, will come in handy and the couple hope to receive the chequered flag and earn good points for the first time this season and kick their championship endeavours into action.

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John Thomson and Maurice Zermatten (Mormond Zarco) finished third in 2019 in Botswana and after not being able to complete the first two events of the 2021 season, a good result and points will give them a push for the rest of the events. Boela Botes/Jay Pretorius (Schalk Burger Motorsport Porter) and Lood du Preez/Tiaan Swart (Farmers Market Stryker) will tread carefully as the sandy racing conditions might be new to them, but they will welcome another helping of points to add to their first points on the scoreboard.

Three teams have entered Class P including local Upington businessman, Willem du Toit and Victor Fincham (CR-T). Daniel Retief and Pieter Karsten (CR-T) and Kobus Fourie/Dion Booyens (BAT) will also take on the marathon.

All the teams in the Class G Championship for Side-x-Sides (SxS), are making use of the extremely capable Can-Am Maverick SxS. This class has produced two different sets of winners this season with both winners finishing on the overall Special Vehicle Category podium. The sand and dunes will however add to their challenge and the toughies will be awarded with valuable points.

Reigning champion Nico du Rand (Waterworld Can-Am) will have Greg Parkin reading the notes and will aim for another victory to keep his championship lead while Dean Bradbury/Timmy Botes will fight to stay in the top five. The Mostert brothers and 2019 champions, Werner and Leon Mostert (Schalk Burger Motorsport) won their class at the 2019 TDR 1000. They have been on a seesaw ride this year after opening their scorecard with a podium result, but then not being able to complete the Sugarbelt 400. A win in the Northern Cape or a podium result will be just what is needed for them to get their championship chase going again.

It might be the first season for the Larney brothers, Cecil and Elardus, but consistent scoring has resulted in them being second in the championship and another good result could cement their podium position for the rest of the season. Another team consisting of two brothers, is the 18-year old Kent Rutherford and Justin (Enza Construction Can-Am), sons of veteran competitor, Archie Rutherford. Kent scored his first points of the season when he finished the Sugarbelt 400. The TGRSA 1000 Desert Race will be a great outing for the brothers and a memorable event for the Rutherford family as Kent celebrates his 19th birthday on Sunday, 20 June.

Many kilometres of desert racing experience could count in favour of Geoff Minnitt who will have Gerhard Snyman reading him the notes. The team will aim for their first finish of the season.

Competing in the marathon desert race, is a bucket list event for the young farmers, Theo Erasmus and Edward Odendaal. They are also looking for their first points of the season and scoring points at the TGRSA 1000 Desert Race will suit them perfectly. Marko Himmel/Francois Schoonbee (Schalk Burger Motorsport) are in the same boat.

Reigning Navigators' champion Rikus Hattingh has navigated his way into third place in the Class G Navigators' Championship by first sitting next to Coenie Bezuidenhout and then reading the notes for Coenie's son, Bazil (Moto-Netix KEC Racing). Bazil will be the designated driver for the Upington event and the team will hope for another successful outing.

The Pirelli Qualifying Race of approximately 130 kilometres will get the TGRSA 1000 Desert Race underway on Friday, 18 June. The qualifying race will include a mini dune section and the results will determine the starting order for Saturday when a 200 kilometre loop, to be repeated twice, awaits the teams. The leading competitor will open the road at 08:00 and after completing the loop, they will have a compulsory 30-minute de-control and service break before taking on the loop again.

The starting order for the final race day on Sunday will be determined by the combined results of Friday and Saturday. A different 200km loop that will again include mini dunes, dry riverbeds and hard-pack terrain will be on the menu for the final day. Teams will again stop for a mandatory 30-minute service break before completing the loop for a second time.

The race headquarters as well as the Start/Finish and the Designated Service Park (DSP) will be at the Upington Expo Showgrounds. Spectators are not allowed at the showgrounds as per the current COVID-19 regulations.

Enthusiasts can follow the action on the RallySafe App on iOS and Android devices as well as on Telegram and social media.

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