

THREE RACES – THREE DIFFERENT WINNERS - WHO WILL BE VICTORIOUS AT THE 4X4 MEGA WORLD 400?

After a break of just over three months, the 2021 South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS) will continue again on October 1 and 2, with rounds four and five of the championship, the 4x4 Mega World 400 at Nampo Park outside Bothaville in the Free State. This event was voted Best Event of the Year in 2020 and teams will go back for a double dose and two challenging days with double points serving as the reward for completing almost 800 kilometres of racing.

The sparks have been flying in the Production Vehicle Category where three different teams have been on the top step of the podium while a mere four points now cover the leading drivers in the overall standings while tight battles in the various class championships is keeping everyone on the edge of their seat. And looking at the entry list for the upcoming two rounds, it is clear that no-one is willing to take a chance on losing out on a healthy amount of points – and some great racing in the Free State.

No-one, except the overall Production Vehicle Category and FIA Class leaders, Giniel de Villiers and Dennis Murphy (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux). De Villiers and Murphy will be racing, however, they will do so with the new Toyota GR DKR Hilux T1+ prototype 3.5 litre twin-turbo powered petrol V6 engine, as part of their rigorous testing programme in preparation for the 2022 Dakar Rally. The pair, however, will not be able to score points towards the SACCS championship.

This leaves the door wide open for three other teams to be the new overall leaders at the end of the weekend. A musical chairs situation has resulted in certain pairings not necessarily filling the same positions in the current overall and class championship standings, but the defending champions, Henk Lategan, who missed the opening round and Brett Cummings (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux), who is the leading navigator, are now in contention for the lead if a second consecutive victory at Nampo Park is in the offing.

Also in with a chance to lead and looking for a second race win for the year, are Lance Woolridge/Elvéne Vonk (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) who won the opening round with their new FIA Class Ford Ranger, but then ran into some trouble at the Sugarbelt 400 where they could not score points. And after winning the recent TGRSA 1000 Desert Race in Upington, Brian Baragwanath/Leonard Cremer (Century Racing CR 6) would like nothing better than a follow-up victory and a chance on the title crown with two races to go. Baragwanath and then navigator, Taye Perry, finished second in this event last year and a win will be sweet for the team.

The rest of the teams might be somewhat further back on points in the overall standings as well as in the FIA Class, but that does not mean a victory, podium finish or good result can't throw a spanner in the works. The experienced Chris Visser and his right-hand man on the farm, Albertus Venter (Toyota Hilux) have proven that they have the speed as have Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dreyer (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) and Shameer Variawa/Danie Stassen (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux).

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Team Red-Lined Motorsport will field four teams in the FIA Class at the 4x4 Mega World 400. Conrad Rautenbach/Riaan Greyling will be competing in the all-new Red-Lined REVO while Dubai regular, Thomas Bell and navigator Bruno Jacomy, from Argentina, as well as Philip Botha/Roelof Janse van Vuren will be on the starting line with the VK56. Like Botha/Janse van Vuren, Eben Basson and Gerhard Schutte will attempt to add another good result to their unblemished score-card.

Ernest Roberts/Henry Köhne have also finished all three events so far this season, but have in the meantime switched from 4-wheel drive to 4x2-wheel drive and will be competing with their new Century Racing CR6, which they will be attempting the 2022 Dakar Rally in. Their team-mates, Mark Corbett/Rodney Burk (CR6) will also be in action as will Dewald van Breda/Johann du Toit in their CR5.

A total of 20 teams have entered the FIA Class and includes amongst others Gary Bertholdt/Siegfried Rousseau (Toyota Hilux), Jason Venter/Jaco van Aardt (4x4 Mega World ARB Toyota Hilux) and the father and son team of Johan and Sean van Staden (Moto-Netix KEC Racing Renault Duster), while 2017 Overall and Class A Special Vehicle champion Marius Fourie and Hendrikus Pienaar (Ford) and Richard Leeke Jnr/Zaheer Bodhanya (BSpeed Leeke Motorsport) will make their 2021 debut.

The standings in the Class T championship were overturned after the TGRSA 1000 Desert Race in Upington when the defending champions and winners of the first two rounds, Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux) surrendered their lead. Johan and stand-in navigator, Leander Pienaar, broke down kilometres before the finish of the three-day race. Having scored two runner-up results and winning the 1000 kilometre race in Upington, the father and son team of Malcolm and Frans Kock (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) took the lead in the standings. They have built a sizable gap to their team-mates, Wors Prinsloo/André Vermeulen, who are second after scoring consistently with the Horn brothers not too far behind in third place. An exciting match between these teams awaits in the Free State.

Christo Rose/Arno Olivier, also racing under the Neil Woolridge Motorsport banner in a Ford Ranger, have adapted well from competing with a Side-by-Side in the Special Vehicle Category. They scored points after each event so far this season and are fourth. A podium result is not out of their reach. They will be backed by more team-mates, Bernard Johnstone/Jan Harm Hugo as well as Baphumza Rubuluza/Fanifani Meyiwa in their third outing this season. Rubuluza/Meyiwa rolled their vehicle at Upington and a result with points will go a far way to boost their confidence.

Jason's brother, Dylan Venter and navigator, Vince van Allemann (4x4 Mega World ARB Toyota Hilux) scored good points after both races they participated in this season and will aim for another good performance as sponsors of the event.

The 4x4 Mega World 400 will start at 07:30 on Friday, 1 October with a short 15km sprint that will determine the starting order for the main race. The main race will start at 09:30 and competitors will have to complete a 180km loop towards the east of Nampo Park twice to be deemed finishers of round four of the SACCS.

On Saturday, 2 October round five will again start with a 15km Pirelli Qualifying Race to determine the starting order for the main race that will start at 09:30 and although the loop will be different from the previous day, certain sections might look familiar as it was used in 2020 albeit in the opposite direction. The 180km loop will have to be completed twice with the start/finish at Nampo Park.

Spectators are still not allowed at the event due to the COVID-19 restrictions, but enthusiasts can follow the action on the RallySafe App, sponsored by Toyota, that can be downloaded free of charge for iOS and Android devices. Information will also be shared on the Telegram App as well as on social media.

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