

LATEGAN/CUMMINGS TAKE OVERALL CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD AS TIGHT TITLE BATTLES RAGE ON

After a tough and challenging weekend at Nampo Park outside Bothaville in the Free State where teams competed in the 4x4 Mega World 400 that formed the fourth and fifth rounds of the 2021 South African National Cross Country Series (SACCS), the current standings in the Production Vehicle Championship predict a nail-biting final two rounds to the season.

A double helping of points were on offer at the 4x4 Mega World 400 and after the dust and rain, wind and stormy conditions had settled, new overall leaders emerged at the top of the championship scoreboard. The defending champions, Henk Lategan/Brett Cummings (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux) are now leading the overall standings after claiming their first victory of the season when they won round four on Friday, 1 October. Lategan (108 points) missed the opening round due to an injury he suffered after crashing in the Dakar Rally and has less points than Cummings (126 points), who read the notes for the stand-in driver, the SA Rally Champion, Guy Botterill, at the season opener. Cummings has been leading the navigators' standings since the second round.

The winners of the season opener, Lance Woolridge/Elvéne Vonk (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) became the only team with two victories so far this season when they won the fifth round at Bothaville. They are still second in the overall standings (101 points) with Brian Baragwanath/Leonard Cremer (Century Racing) now on the podium with 92 points. And with the tight margin between the three teams at the front, no-one dare put a wheel wrong as a mistake could spell disaster at the end of the season.

Chris Visser/Albertus Venter moved up to fourth place overall after finishing on the podium for the second time this season. Visser, who missed the season opener, has earned 77 points with Venter on 65 points after reading the notes for Visser in the Toyota Hilux at the last three events. Giniel de Villiers/Dennis Murphy (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA) were leading the standings going to the Free State. They, however, used the Free State races to continue testing the new Toyota Hilux T1+ prototype that will be used for the 2022 Dakar Rally and therefore did not score any points. They still have 64 points each.

Also in the top 10 are Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dreyer (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) in sixth place, trailing De Villiers/Murphy by only two points followed by Ernest Roberts/Henry Köhne (Century Racing CR6) who have finished and scored 46 points at the five events including the two recent 4x4 Mega World 400 events where they competed in their new Century Racing CR6 that will be their weapon of choice for the upcoming Dakar Rally.

The brothers, Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota) could not finish round five at Nampo Park, but have earned enough points (41) during the season to be the leading Class T team on the overall standings and are eighth, four points ahead of the second Class T team, Malcolm and his son, Frans Kock (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford). The Kocks could not finish the fourth round this season.

Botterill (35 points) is tenth in the drivers' standings while Danie Stassen (32 points), who sits next to Shameer Variawa (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux), rounds off the top 10 of the navigators with Variawa (32 points) just outside the top 10 in 11th place amongst the drivers.

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With competitors receiving five points for starting a race and due to the musical chairs situation, the standings in the various class championships looks somewhat different to the overall classification. In the FIA Class Drivers' Championship, Lance Woolridge (126 points) trails Lategan (128 points) by a mere two points with Baragwanath (120 points) still on the podium and within striking distance. Visser (100 points) is fourth with Gareth Woolridge (91 points) not too far behind in fifth place.

De Villiers (81 points) is sixth, only one point ahead of Roberts (80 points) with Dewald van Breda (Century Racing CR6) and Johan van Staden (Moto-Netix KEC Racing Renault), who scored at all five events, both on 63 points behind Roberts. Eben Basson (Red-Lined Motorsport) returned from the Free State with a best result finishing round four in the overall top 10. He currently rounds off the top ten (61 points).

In the FIA Class Navigators' Championship, Cummings (156 points) has opened up a fairly comfortable gap to Vonk (126 points) although 30 points does not put him out of her reach. Cremer (115 points) is third and close enough to Vonk to fight for her position while he is being chased by Dreyer (91 points) in fourth place. Murphy (81 points) is fifth, only one point ahead of both Köhne and Venter (80 points) who will be looking to overtake him for a chance of finishing in the top five.

Johann Du Toit, who sits next to Van Breda and Johan van Staden's son and navigator, Sean, have both earned 63 points with a mere two points separating them from Basson's navigator, Gerhard Schutte (61 points) who rounds off the top 10 of the FIA Class navigators.

In the Class T championship, it was an up and down weekend for the Kocks in the Free State. They could not finish the fourth round, but went on to win the class at the next round, the following day, to keep their lead in the championship (146 points). They have opened a gap of 27 points to their team-mates, Wors Prinsloo/André Vermeulen (119 points) who claimed the victory on the fourth round, but could not finish round five. Neil Woolridge Motorsport currently owns the Class T championship podium with Christo Rose/Arno Olivier (115 points) third and hot on the heels of their team-mates, Prinsloo/Vermeulen.

The defending champions, the Horn brothers, are fourth (100 points) with Johan on 100 points and Werner 95 after missing the TGRSA 1000 Desert Race at Upington. They are still in with a chance of finishing the season on the podium although yet another Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford team, Bernard Johnstone/Jan Harm Hugo, are too close for comfort with Johnstone (97 points) and Jan Harm Hugo on 80 points.

In the Class T Drivers' Championship, Dylan Venter (4x4 Mega World Toyota) missed the season opener and could not finish round four in the Free State. He has accumulated 77 points and is sixth followed by Baphumza Rubuluza (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford) with 65 points after an eventful season that included rolling the vehicle at the desert race and finishing second at the fifth round.

In the Class T Navigators' Championship, Rubuluza's navigator, Fanifani Meyiwa, is sixth (65 points) with Vince van Allemann, who sat next to Venter for the last three races, seventh (57 points) and Donovan Lubbe, who joined Venter at the second round, eighth (20 points). Johnstone's wife, Minette is ninth with 17 points she earned after opening the season with him.

In Class S, Jannie Visser and his son, Chris Jnr (Toyota Hilux) lead (29 points) after beating another father and son team, Piet and Benjamin Kotze (Toyota Hilux) in the desert. They have 25 points.

Toyota leads the Manufacturer's Championship with 420 points followed by Ford (259 points) and Century Racing (157 points) third. Nissan (98 points) is fourth and Renault (29 points) rounds off the top five.

As the saying goes: It is never over until the 'fat lady sings' and looking at the current standings and the fierce competition during the first five rounds, anything can still happen. Teams have two more opportunities to score points and will be tested for the penultimate time this season on 29 and 30 October when they take on the Vryburg 400 in the North West Province.

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