

## VICTORY AT PARYS AND THE CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE FOR LATEGAN AND CUMMINGS

The TGRSA Parys 400, the seventh and final round of the 2021 South African Cross Country Series (SACCS) that took place on Saturday, 20 November, at Parys in the Free State, was a nerve-wrecking event that produced spectacular racing before the defending champions, Henk Lategan and Brett Cummings (Toyota Gazoo Racing SA Hilux) earned their third successive Overall Production Vehicle Category Championship title as well as the FIA Class Championship Titles.

A major battle was on the cards for the overall and FIA Drivers' Championship title as Cummings had already wrapped up the FIA Navigators' Championship title. This meant the battle of the titans was between Lategan and Lance Woolridge (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) while Woolridge's navigator, Elvéne Vonk, was safe as the runner-up.

The TGRSA Parys 400 was a one day event with a short 15 kilometre Pirelli Qualifying Race on Saturday morning that determined the starting order for the main race. With no margin for error and two loops of 175km waiting, the racing was as exhilarating as expected. The two TGRSA Hilux teams of Giniel de Villiers/Dennis Murphy and visiting world champions, Nasser Al-Attiya/Mathieu Baumel competing in the new DKR Hilux T1+ which has been approved for the Dakar Rally 2022, added to the action although neither teams scored point towards the championships.

Lategan/Cummings posted the second fastest time behind Al-Attiya/Baumel with Woolridge/Vonk fourth on the road behind De Villiers/Murphy. The defending champions took the lead during the first of the two loops and except for a flat tyre ten kilometres from the finish, they stuck to their guns to finish behind their non-scoring team-mates (De Villiers/Murphy) claiming the victory (04:09:48) and the accompanying titles.

Woolridge/Vonk had the shock absorbers of their Ford Ranger tweaked during the break after the first loop, but had to settle for second place (04:14:37). The FIA Class podium was rounded off by the TGRSA Hilux team of Shameer Variawa/Danie Stassen (04:21:53) who initially struggled with brake problems and had two punctures in the second loop.

A mere 41 seconds after 365 tough kilometres in the Free State separated the two FIA teams in fourth and fifth place with the 4x4 Mega World Racing Toyota Hilux team of Jason Venter/Jaco van Aardt edging out the 2021 Special Vehicle Champions, Lance Trethewey/Adriaan Roets (King Price Xtreme Century Racing CR6) who made their debut in the Production Vehicle Category. It was an all-new driving experience for Trethewey who also lost time with a flat tyre during the first loop.

The rest of the FIA Class top ten included three Red-Lined Motorsport teams. Eben Basson/Gerhard Schutte (VK56) posted their best result by finishing sixth (04:30:23) after a fairly trouble-free race with their team-mates, Conrad Rautenbach/Riaan Greyling (REVO) eighth (04:31:01) despite losing time due to brake problems and a puncture on the first loop. And it was yet another finish for Philip Botha/Roelof Janse van Vuren (VK56) who added to their unblemished record in their first national season. They finished 10<sup>th</sup> in the FIA Class (04:38:51).

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To complete a full house of results for the team, the Dubai visitor, Thomas Bell and KZN businessman, Wade Harris, brought their VK56 home in 11<sup>th</sup> place in the class (05:16:25).

The father and son team of Johan and Sean van Staden (Moto-Netix KEC Racing Renault Duster) rounded off their eventful 2021 season on a high note by finishing seventh in the FIA Class with only 39 seconds separating them from Basson/Schutte while Dewald van Breda/Johann du Toit (Century Racing CR6) were ninth (04:33:33).

The Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger teams claimed the top two steps of the Class T podium and this time it was Wors Prinsloo/André Vermeulen who secured their second victory of the season. They were the second Class T team off the line after the 15 kilometre Pirelli Qualifying Sprint and eventually finished only seven minutes and 46 seconds ahead of their team-mates, Christo Rose/Arno Olivier (04:38:51) who will be able to reflect on a successful first season in the Production Vehicle Category with a 100% finishing record.

There was not much between the Class T podium finishers with Dylan Venter/Vince van Allemann (4x4 Mega World Racing Toyota Hilux) third, one minute 12 seconds behind Rose/Olivier. The Neil Woolridge Motorsport Development Team, Baphumza Rubuluza/Fanifani Meyiwa also added another finish to round off their season and were fourth in Class T (04:54:05).

The former champions, Johan and Werner Horn (Malalane Toyota Hilux) were leading Class T after the qualifying race, but their hopes of finishing the season on the podium disappeared in a cloud of dust as they could not finish. Bernard Johnstone/Jan Harm Hugo (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) had two flat tyres and lost too much time with a broken jack and also retired.

There was also disappointment for both Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dreyer (Ford Castrol Cross Country Ranger) and Chris Visser/Albertus Venter (Toyota Hilux) who were fighting for the fourth place in the FIA Championship. Woolridge/Dreyer went head over heels early in the second loop after running in the top five during the first loop while Visser/Venter hit a rock 40 kilometres into the second loop and retired.

Al-Attiya/Baumel were also between the teams who had to call it a day before receiving the chequered flag with wire wrapped around the axle of their DKR Hilux T1+ while Gary Bertholdt/Siegfried Rousseau (Toyota Hilux) could also not see out the distance.

And when the dust and wind and even some rain had settled over the Free State, the SACCS can look back on another enjoyable and successful TGRSA Parys 400 that rounded off an extremely exciting and competitive season.

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