



Media Information

## THE CHASE IS ON WITH THE FIRST INTRICATE POINTS IN THE SA RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIP IN THE BAG

The Mpumalanga 400, the opening round of the 2022 South African Rally-Raid Championship, formerly known as the SA Cross Country Series, was a slippery, wet and muddy affair with the weather again producing its normal curve ball, like numerous times in the past, at this event in the Dullstroom area. In the end, the first points are on the scoreboard and it predicts a spine-tingling season.

In the Production Vehicle Category, the new Class FIA T1+ was introduced for vehicles with bigger wheels and modified suspension. Competitors in this class, together with the regular Class FIA T1 and Class T, are all in with a shot at the overall standings while they are also aiming for the various class championship titles.

It was the 2021 champions, Henk Lategan/Brett Cummings (Toyota Gazoo Racing DKR Hilux T1+) who got their defence off to a perfect start when they won the Mpumalanga 400 and bagged 30 points towards the overall championship. Their team-mates, Shameer Variawa/Danie Stassen, finished second, albeit by a mere 48 seconds, to set the tone for their season, they trail Lategan/Cummings by seven points.

And it was a well-earned third place overall and Class FIA T1 victory for Eben Basson/Leander Pienaar (#TeamHilux Rally Raid) who scored 18 points towards the overall standings. Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dreyer (NWM Ford Castrol Team Ranger T1+) are fourth, three points behind Basson/Pienaar and three points ahead of the Toyota Gazoo Racing DKR Hilux T1+ in the hands of the multiple SA National Rally Champions, Guy Botterill and Simon Vacy-Lyle who are still relatively new to the Rally-Raid scene, but already making their intentions clear.

The remainder of the overall top ten include Gary Bertholdt (Renergen Toyota Hilux T1) who made use of the services of Philip Herselman who has been living abroad for three years now. They were second in Class FIA T1 and scored 10 points for finishing sixth overall. Wors Prinsloo/André Vermeulen (Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger) opened their scorecard with a Class T victory and nine points for finishing seventh overall with their Class T team-mates, Bernard and Minette Johnstone ninth overall and scoring seven points while Christo Rose/Arno Olivier were 10<sup>th</sup> (six points).

Giniel de Villiers/Dennis Murphy (Toyota Gazoo Racing DKR Hilux T1+), would probably have earned themselves the 'Bad Luck Award' for getting stuck in a mud-hole while leading the field towards the end of the race. They lost 45 minutes and eventually finished eighth overall and fifth in Class FIA T1+ and scored eight points. With the extremely tough competition, De Villiers/Murphy will have their work cut out for them as they start their 2022 season with a gap of 22 points to the leaders.

In the various class championships for vehicles with the same specification levels, the intensity of the battles will grow as the season develops. Competitors are also awarded an additional five points for starting a race which makes these class championships look somewhat different to the overall standings.

In the Class FIA T1+ Lategan/Cummings (35 points) lead Variawa/Stassen by seven points with Gareth Woolridge/Dreyer third (23 points). Botterill/Vacy-Lyle are fourth (20 points) while the gap to De Villiers/Murphy (17 points) is not too big. Lance Woolridge/Elvéne Vonk (NWM Ford Castrol Team Ranger T1+) hit a tree while leading at Dullstroom and were forced to retire. They are now sixth with a real battle to make up for lost points on their hands.

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Basson/Pienaar (35 points) are the early leaders in the Class FIA T1 championship and will be chased by a committed field led by second-placed Bertholdt/Herselman who got off to a good start with a marginal points' gap (seven points). Hennie de Klerk/Adriaan Roets (VW Amarok) eventually rounded off the FIA T1 podium and scored 23 points towards their title chase, despite enduring four punctures on Saturday.

De Klerk/Roets posted the second fastest time in the Production Vehicle Category after the short 20 kilometre Pirelli Qualifying Race on Friday, but the team did not have a great second day that included having a bent propshaft replaced after they hit a rock, losing time getting stuck in a river crossing and later having to remove the windscreen when it was shattered by a rock from another vehicle.

The international team, Dave Klaassen and Tessa Rooth, made a successful start on South African (muddy) soil and lead the rest of the Red-Lined Motorsport Team. They finished fourth in the class with their VK56 and bagged 20 points, a mere three points more than Johan de Bruyn, who made his debut in the SA Rally-Raid Championship with a similar VK56 together with veteran navigator, Gerhard Schutte. Team-mates, Conrad Rautenbach/Wade Harris (Red-Lined REVO) and Philip Botha/Riaan Greyling (VK56) hit a rock and a tree stump respectively that broke a wheel on their vehicles, resulting in them not being able to complete the first of the two race days.

They persevered and started the final day at the back of the field to finish sixth (Rautenbach/Harris) and seventh (Botha/Greyling) in the class and were rewarded with 15 and 14 points respectively. Lance Trethewey/Frans Kock (King Price Xtreme Ford Ranger); Richard Leeke/Zaheer Bodhanya (BSpeed Leeke Motorsport) and Daniel Schröder/Ryan Bland (PS Laser Nissan Navara) have five points after not being able to complete the season opener.

All four teams that started the Mpumalanga 400 in the Class T championship, finished and secured their first points with the podium being monopolised by Neil Woolridge Motorsport Ford Ranger teams. The first victory of the season went to Wors Prinsloo/André Vermeulen who earned 23 points while a runner-up result for Bernard and his wife, Minette Johnstone, saw them walking away with 20 points. Christo Rose/Arno Olivier got 17 points for finishing third.

It was not an easy race for the 17-year old Jayden Els and navigator Armand du Toit (King Price Xtreme Renault Duster) who filled the last place on the overall results, but their fourth place in Class T means they opened their 2022 scorebook with 15 points, only eight points behind the leaders.

Teams are now preparing for the Sugarbelt 400, proudly sponsored by #TeamHilux Rally-Raid, that takes place on 29 and 30 April in the Eston/Mid Illovo areas in KwaZulu-Natal, and if the season opener is anything to go by, another super exciting race can be expected at the traditionally popular event run in the lush sugar cane fields of KZN.

Images: Andre Schoeman – [click to download](#)

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