



Media Information

NEW VEHICLES, NEW TEAMS AND CLASS SHUFFLES PREDICT AN EXCITING SARRC SEASON OPENER AT THE NKOMAZI 400

The Nkomazi 400, the first round of the 2023 South African Rally-Raid Championship, scheduled to take place on 24 and 25 March in the Malelane area in Mpumalanga, promises to be an exciting event and the results can cause a ripple effect on the rest of the season.

While an array of new vehicles will be in action at national level for the first time, new driver and navigator combinations as well as team movements in the different classes, will heighten the level of excitement. Add to that the fact that the popular Nkomazi 400 event has not been on the national calendar for six years, a winning recipe is on the cards for the season opener.

The spectacular results of South African competitors in the recent Dakar Rally combined with the performance of locally produced racing vehicles is still fresh news and these factors will no doubt contribute to an action-packed weekend where teams will take on 415 testing kilometres in the beautifully scenic Malelane area.

In the Production Vehicle Category, the FIA T1+ Class is bursting with new names and vehicles. A late adaptation to the rules has also resulted in the small FIA T1.2 Class for 2x4 vehicles being abolished for the new season with these teams now competing in FIA T1+.

There are no changes to the look of the three Toyota Gazoo Racing SA teams, who will be competing with the Dakar Rally winning DKR Hilux T1+. Giniel de Villiers will be defending his overall drivers' title together with regular navigator, Dennis Murphy while Henk Lategan, and the 2022 navigators' champion, Brett Cummings will again aim to add to their three previous titles. Guy Botterill/Simon Vacy-Lyle have shown that they have what it takes to win and their goal will be more regular podium results.

The local Malelane team, Johan and Werner Horn (#TeamHilux Rally-Raid) will again be in action with a similar DKR Hilux T1+ and they would like nothing more than to treat the home crowd with a good result. The experienced driver, Gary Bertholdt (Renegen Toyota Hilux) has teamed up with navigator Henry Köhne and has moved from T1 to the T1+ Class where they will hope to start the season on a high note.

The Ford camp has undergone a few changes. Lance Woolridge will have multiple motorcycle cross-country national champion, Kenny Gilbert, reading him the notes in the NWM Ford Castrol Ranger T1+ while teammates, Gareth Woolridge/Boyd Dreyer will take on the rest of the field with the Ford Ranger 3.5 GTDI V6 Ecoboost. After not competing last year, Wors Prinsloo and André Vermeulen have moved from Class T to T1+ where they will bolster the Ford entries with their Ranger T1+.

Veteran competitor, Chris Visser and Albertus 'Blikkies' Venter are now also competing in FIA T1+ with their Red-Lined Motorsport REVO and after noteworthy performances in 2022, the team might cause a few upsets.

Four teams have entered with Century Racing CR 2x4 vehicles including the 2022 FIA T1.2 champion, Lance Trethewey and Adriaan Roets (King Price Xtreme CR6) who will be looking to reel in a good result. Brian Baragwanath/Leonard Cremer will put their turbo-powered Dakar Rally performer, the Century Racing CR6T in contention while stalwart Dewald van Breda will be joined by Stompie Mynhardt. Namibian driver, Loic Bathfield, will make his SARRC debut together with navigator Rodney Burke.

The FIA T1 Class will be as busy and looking at the entry list, it will be a dangerous move to bet on any one team for a possible win. The current champions, Eben Basson/Leander Pienaar (#TeamHilux Rally-Raid) will put their recent Dakar Rally experience to good use to defend their title successfully, but they might have their hands full to fend off the opposition including teammates, Fouché and Bertus Blignaut who will line-up for their second SARRC season.

Red-Lined Motorsport have a strong presence in this competitive class and will field three teams of which the ever-consistent Philip Botha, who has teamed up with his brother, Nicolaas in the VK56, will aim for even more race finishes to add to his growing list. Johan de Bruyn/Gerhard Schutte (Red-Lined Revo) as well as the international duo of Dave Klaassen/Tessa Rooth (VK50) will again be in action as will Nicolas Pienaar/Carl Swanepoel (Red-Lined Revo).

Other familiar names in the class include Richard Leeke/Rikus Fourie (Leeke Motorsport) and Schalk Burger/Henk Janse van Vuuren (King Price Xtreme Mercedes-Benz). There will be three new teams competing in the FIA T1 Class. The current Class T drivers' champion, youngster Jayden Els has acquired the navigating services of Elvéne Vonk (King Price Xtreme SVR) while the 2022 Class T runners-up, the father and son team of Johan and Sean van Staden (KEC Racing Renault Duster) will also line up in this class.

The FIA T1 Class also welcomes the 2022 Class G runners-up and 2023 Dakar Rally finishers, Geoff Minnitt and Gerhard Snyman (Hydro Power Equipment WCT Toyota Hilux).

Class T has the looks of a family affair with the Johnstone couple, Bernard and Minette (NWM Ford Ranger) as well as Hendrik and Heinrich du Plessis (Ford Ranger) back in action while the Nienaber brothers, Nico and Juandré (King Price Xtreme Renault Duster) will make their SARRC debut.

In the Special Vehicle Category, three teams have entered in Class A with the defending champions, Tim Howes/Gary Campbell (BAT Spec 4) ready for a third title. Lood du Preez (Farmers Meat Stryker) finished second in 2022 and will have Rikus Hatting navigating for him while Eugene Bierman/Pieter Visser (BAT Spec 2) will be the new kids on the block.

In Class G, the roles of the defending champions have changed for 2023 with dad Werner Mostert finding himself in the hot seat reading the notes for his son, Ian, who will be behind the wheel of the Moto-Netix Racing Can-Am Maverick. Their teammates, Glen Theron/Craig Galvin, finished the 2022 season in third place and are back for more as are Francois and Neil de Wit (Can-Am Maverick). The Nkomazi 400 will be a first SARRC experience for Johan Scheepers navigating for Ewald van Rensburg in a similar Can-Am Maverick.

The Nkomazi 400, with support of #TeamHilux Rally-Raid and Nkomazi Fuel, starts on Friday, 24 March at 12:30 with a 65-kilometre Pirelli Qualifying Race to determine the starting order for the main race on Saturday. The Start/Finish, Race Headquarters and Designated Service Point (DSP) will be at the Nkomazi Fuel & Gas Depot approximately four kilometres from Malelane.

The leading team will start the main race on Saturday at 08:00 from the same venue and will return to the DSP for a compulsory service break after completing the first of two 175km loops. The race will finish at the Nkomazi Fuel & Gas Depot where the podium ceremonies will take place.

Enthusiasts can follow the race on the RallySafe App that can be downloaded from the iStore and Google PlayStore while spectators will have access to various vantage points along the route to view the racing action. Route maps will be available on the www.sacrosscountryracing.co.za

For more information about the event and the championship visit:

Facebook: saccsauto or TeamHiluxRallyRaid

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Stalwart