

ALGOA NATIONAL RALLY IN FOCUS

R2N CLASS



Probably the biggest fight for overall event honours will come from the R2N young guns.

The pick for the favourite is not as clear as black and white.

The current SA Championship leader is AC Potgieter and Nico Swartz. This pairing have proved that they have the speed to lead from the front and will be pushing their absolute best in Volkswagen's home ground to win this event and extend their lead with their Lake Umuzi VW Polo. They still need to win an event in 2018 and this could well be the place where they break their duck. 1 point behind AC in the championship is Guy Botterill and Simon Vacy-Lylle whom have etched their names in the record books in 2017 by setting the fastest 2 wheel drive times ever through the notorious MTO Longmore Stages in their Toyota Gazoo Racing Etios R2N.

Breaking stage records did not help the Gazoo Racing crew in the end of the rally as the event honours went to Richard Leeke and Henry Kohne in their Speedglass Fiesta, which also made Richard the Youngest winner of a South African Rally at the age of 21 years and 4 months. Guy and Simon had a rare engine failure in 2017 and they will be back to settle the score for good. Will we see another mature drive from the young Richard to take a double on the PE event or will AC and Guy spoil his day?

The Swazi Cowboy Ford Fiesta of Jono van Wyk and Barry White showed remarkable pace in the forest of York in Sabie by leading the SA contingent before their engine let them down at the end of Day 1. This fast team cannot be discarded either for the overall fight and will prove their speed was no fluke. Neither can Matthew Vacy Lylle be discarded in the Yato Tools Toyota Etios with stand in navigator Rikus Fourie, Matthew will be hoping for a clean run to maximum points with the local knowledge of PE resident Fourie. JJ Potgieter and Tommy du Toit in the Verco Energy Ford Fiesta also had to retire from last year's event but they have learnt valuable lessons in their first year of rallying and they will implement all of that knowledge to good use.

Chris Coerste and Greg Godrich in their beautiful Electrothread Mazda 2 will be taking the fight in the *Masters Class to Tjaart Conradie and Mari vd Walt in the Silverton Engineering Toyota Etios. This duo have shown good pace and will be entangled in their own battles again. George Smalberger and Carolyn Swan in the Shield racing VW Polo will also be vying for a good placing, but the Polo had to undergo some surgery after the car ended up on its side at the last event.

The team from Bloemfontein who is also running under the ARC banner, will be going for best placed in the Masters Class as well as best placed ARC crew on this event. Thus Jacques du Toit and Ronald Rens won't be just going toe-to-toe with the R2N competitors, but also need to keep an eye out for the ARC competitors in the Open Class and ARC Class.

*Masters class is for individual competitors in the R2N class over the age of 35.

This includes: Tjaart Conradie (Leading Driver), Chris Coertse, George Smalberger, Jacques du Toit, Barry White, Rikus Fourie, Tommy du Toit, Greg Godrich (Leading Navigator), Carolyn Swan, Ronald Rens.

OPEN CLASS

A Total of 10 crews have entered in the Open Class and this will be a very hotly contested affair with no clear favorites.

Ismael Shermohammed will be making his first appearance in the Eastern Cape with his Toyota Yaris S2000 with experienced Pierre Jordaan in the hot-seat. He faces stiff competition from Ex double SA champion Hergen Fekken in the rally converted VW Polo Cup Racing car with another multiple class champion Carl Peskin reading the notes. This will be an interesting car to watch as the VW team is racing against time to have the car ready in time for its debut. Another debut in PE will be Rory Eland in his yellow Subaru who will rely on Robbie Coetzee's experience of this event.

These crews face a gaggle of VW Polos from the local ARC entries whom all have a strong ARC championship presence. The entries include Clyde Challenor from Ballito and Grayham Bishop who will be out to prove they are the fastest ARC crew but they will have to fend off current ARC Champions, the father and daughter crew of Johan and Juane Viljoen in their championship prize winning VW Polo. Johan's cousin is another father-daughter pairing, the 2016 ARC Champions Riekus Schmidt and Sherilee Pieterse. Further to the family legions, Steph Pieterse (Sherilee's husband) will be tackling the stages with the 1200 Turbo Polo. All of these crews prove to be quick, but new kid on the block will be Nick Davidson and Ashley Bezuidenhout who recently took their brand new Polo R2N spec car to an ARC Rally win on the previous ARC Round. Ashley himself won the drivers' Championship in the past and his experience will help Nick to fine tune the art of gravel racing from the navigator's seat. Another previous champion is Ross Bartle with his sister Roxanne in the hot-seat reading the notes. The current Open Class points leader Ian Rademeyer will be teaming up with his daughter Maryna Britz on his home event instead of his usual navigator Matt Kohler (also Nav points leader) who will be with Steph Pieterse.

A big part of the success in the Eastern Cape is the heavy family presence and fantastic atmosphere that has been created by the ARC. These boys and girls are serious about their rallying, but they are more serious about making the whole family a part of the experience and enjoyment.

All bets on the table who will be the Open Class winner as there's no clear favorite to choose from.

CLASSIC CLASS

The Classic Class will be represented by Hubi von Moltke in his VW Golf 2 who returns after an unsuccessful debut last year to complete the Eastern Cape Challenge. This year he has the editor of the popular Classic & Performance Car magazine Stuart Grant as his navigator and hopes to build on his good points scored in the Tour Natal.

Bryan Heine had his brother Gary as navigator in the York rally but the Ford Escort wasn't too kind on the crew with an overheating engine. For the Algoa National Rally, Bryan will opt to use his Datsun SSS instead and his brothers, Gary and Keith Heine, will drive of the Escort in this family duel for Classic honours. Kevin Futcher will read the notes in the Datsun.

The ever popular Etienne MALherbe with his son Mauritz reading the notes will be returning to defend his class win from last year. Etienne will be hoping his Datsun SSS will be giving him the same result again this year.

SPECTATOR FRIENDLY STAGES

The Algoa Rally Club, or ARC as they are affectionately known, have pulled out all stops to ensure the spectators are the winners of this year's ALGOA NATIONAL RALLY. A very compact route with repeat stages are on the cards which allows the spectators to enjoy a relaxing vantage point to see all the cars in the field. A full 41 entries are expected to take starters orders at the ceremonial start at Baywest Mall on Friday at 13h40 as they head out to the Jachtvlakte stage.

This will be no walk in the park as this is a very technical stage that will test the trust of the rally crew with their notes and commitment as well as their ability to adapt to the ever changing conditions. To add to the challenge is the fact that majority of the surface is clay based and the slightest hint of moisture will catch out any crew not on their toes. The tricky 23.5km stage will start at 14h07 and the best spectating point will be near VWSA in Uitenhage. The crews will drive all the way back to Baywest Mall for a routine service before they tackle the stage again at 16h07.

Baywest Mall will again feature the spectacular night stage with its massive spectator jump where the cars are guaranteed to fly. This tricky tarmac / gravel stage is more about ego boosting and personal bragging rights than stage times as the rally is won and lost in the forest stages of day 2. The stage will also feature a two pass, with the first run through the stages expected to start at 18h00 and the second pass at 19h35.

Saturday will be the main feature in the MTO Longmore Forest. An easy 20 minutes' drive away from Baywest Mall towards Jbay on the N2 is where it's all be happening. Longmore Forest is situated off the Hankey turn off to your right. Once inside the forest, the spectator points is all situated within a 3 km radius and the viewing points will be out of this world due to the fire from last year. Most of the trees have been removed, thus you can see the cars from afar approaching the points giving you almost an amphitheatre feel.

The timing of the stages has also been spread out in such a way that you can view the whole field pass through before moving to the next stage. Don't forget that there will be a jumping castle for the kids in the service area as well as food and toilet facilities. Luister FM will be broadcasting from the Service Park providing some musical entertainment for the day. Entrance to the forest is free. Action will start from 08h00 in the morning so make sure you get there early for your best spot.

The Final stage will be a repeat of the Baywest Stage at 15h20. For the ARC crews this is more than just a stage, it is an internal competition amongst the crews called the Dash-for-Cash. It is all about bragging rights whereby the crew who makes it first over the BigFoot Express Jump is declared the Dash-for-Cash champ. A small monetary prize is also up for grabs to the winner.

A Podium Champagne Spray is expected in front of Entrance 4 after the stage is completed under the NRC arch.



Ian Rademeyer / Matt Kohler (VW Polo)



Jono van Wyk / Barry White (Ford Fiesta)



Etienne Malherbe / Mauritz Malherbe (Datsun SSS)