

No luck for Variawa and Rousseau at Carnival City

Shameer Variawa and Siegfried Rousseau (Total Porter) were out of luck in last weekend's (August 28, 2010) 4x4 Mega World 400 at Carnival City, but managed to hold on to their lead in the 2010 Absa South African Off Road Car Championship.

Variawa, the 2000 Special Vehicle champion, and Rousseau had come into the fifth round of the series with a handy 18-point lead over Johan van Staden and James Rossouw and 25 ahead of Kallie and Quintin Sullwald.

Disaster struck as early as Friday's 67-km Donaldson prologue that determined the start order for Saturday's 356-km race. The pair encountered a deep drainage ditch filled with muddy water and when they tried to cross it the two left hand wheels of the Total Porter got stuck in the ditch. They tried to drive out of the obstacle, but the further they went the muddier it became and they eventually had to be towed out.

As a result they were unable to complete the prologue and had to start the race from 57th place among the combined field of Special and Production Vehicles.

Faced with the daunting prospect of overtaking so many vehicles in the thick dust, while at the same time having to watch out for rocks and other obstacles in their way, the Total pair was making good progress when a gear selector broke 70 km into the first of the two 178-km loops that made up the route. They tried to make running repairs – Rossouw even legged it back some distance to another stranded competitor, Naeem Moosajee in another Porter, to borrow some tools – but were out of luck.

Ironically, the race was won by Hermann Sullwald and his son Wichard in their SVR V8, a car built by Variawa and based on the Porter.

"We've put ourselves under a bit of pressure now to win this championship, but with the 1 000-km Toyota Desert Race next month as one of the three remaining rounds, we're confident we're still in with a good chance," said the 33-year-old Mayfair (Gauteng) businessman.

"I was brought up in Botswana as a small boy and this is my favourite event. It was always my dream to win the Desert Race. After 16 years of trying, Siegfried and I have won it twice in a row now and are aiming for our hat-trick this year."

Variawa and Rousseau lead the Special Vehicle category by six points from Kallie and Quintin Sullwald (who finished second in the 4x4 Mega World 400) and by nine points from Johan van Staden and James Rossouw, who were seventh. With 25 points for a win, there is still everything to play for.