

Rana ready to storm the 'Desert'

Five-time champion is top contender again

RAYAN ROZARIO

COIMBATORE

He comes from the small village of Karjan in Himachal Pradesh, but that has not stopped Suresh Rana from becoming the country's finest cross country rally driver.

The Team Maruti Suzuki Motorsport star will take on the best in the 16th edition of the Maruti Suzuki Desert Storm which begins at Noida on Sunday.

In a telephonic chat with *The Hindu* from Manali, the five-time champion said he was fully prepared to storm the desert in the Xtreme category.

"We have been driving in the desert since 2004. We are so used to it. We will have to just go out there and get the lead and maintain it. I am confident of doing it," he said.

Rana will be in the same winning car (the Grand Vitar) as last year, but, this time around, he has a new co-driver in P.V.S. Murthy.

"He is very experienced. I did the Raid de Himalaya



Raring to go: Suresh Rana has tons of experience in handling various terrains. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

with him last year. So we have a great understanding," said Rana.

But Desert Storm is totally different from Raid de Himalaya. It does not matter for Rana as he has tons of experience in handling various terrains and the best and worst of conditions.

Rana said the first leg might not be difficult, but the second leg could be.

"It may well test Murthy's skills as they have not given the GPS route. I will have to totally rely on the naviga-

tor's call."

It's going to be tricky and tough driving through the sand dunes for the 250-odd participants, and particularly for Rana and Murthy.

"We may have the experience but we will be under some pressure being the top contender," said Rana.

It was a close finish last year.

"That was because we earned some penalties at the transport stage but that won't happen this time," he added.