

## **KWANDA MOKOENA CROWNED SA ENDURANCE CHAMPION AT THRILLING KILLARNEY 9-HOUR**

Race review: SA Endurance Championship, Rd 7

Killarney International Raceway, Cape Town

9 - 10 December 2022

44 cars entered the Killarney 9-Hour; just one proved the dominant force. Kwanda Mokena drove faultlessly to become the youngest-ever SA Endurance Champion at the Killarney 9-Hour in Cape Town, part of the Cape Motorsport Festival which featured the final two rounds of the SAGT National Championship and a nine-artist music concert as the Southern African Endurance Series came to a dramatic and exciting conclusion.

The 18-year-old Mokoena, partnered with another young SA hotshot Andrew Rackstraw and Audi factory driver Luca Engstler dominated proceedings in Cape Town after claiming pole position in their MJR Motorsport/Amandla Coal Audi R8 LMS GT3 Evo2 and proceeded to lead from lights to flag, emerging three laps clear of title rival Tschops Sipuka, partnered with Xolile Letlaka and Stuart White in their Into Africa Mining Lamborghini Huracan GT3 who duly finished second overall.

The Lambo suffered tyre issues in the opening stint with White unable to keep up with the flying Audi. White set the fastest race lap as he dug deep to close down the gap, making it back on to the lead lap by mid-race. During a brief rain shower, which occurred moments after his pitstop, White was one second faster than the whole field as the young charger tried to close the gap.

The third championship contender Hein Lategan ended third in his Black Bull Racing Porsche 911 GT3 Cup with co-drivers Henk Lategan and Verissimo Tavares giving their all in their near-standard Porsche ending four laps down on the Lamborghini after a trouble-free race.

Fourth overall was a fantastic effort from Mo Mia/Lee Thompson (Toys-R-Us Porsche 911 GT3). The car's left front corner was badly damaged during a pitlane accident during Friday night's practice session; parts were ordered, arrived at 07h30 and the car was ready to race by 9am after a mammoth effort from the team.

Fifth overall was the Bucketlist Racing BMW 340i of Heinz Bose and Christopher and Anthony Pretorius in spite of suffering a broken control arm which the team had to make running repairs to keep the car running over the final half-hour.

Danie van Niekerk and Roberto/David Franco (Graphix Supply World Volkswagen Polo SupaCup) claimed a surprised class D win and sixth overall. Van Niekerk had to repair a right-rear wheel bearing which cost the team 30 minutes in the pits. Over the final 30 minutes of the race, Van Niekerk was involved in a huge fight with Johan de Bruyn's similar Polo.

The heartbreak story of the Killarney 9-Hour befell Karah Hill/Michael Stephen/Jurie Swart's Kalex VW Polo. The trio were in a comfortable class lead and fifth overall for eight hours and 53 minutes when the left-front wheel bearing failed – with seven minutes of the race remaining!

The factory Volkswagen Polo GTi SupaCup of Daniel Rowe/Keagan Masters was well in the hunt until the halfway mark when a fuel pump fitting failure caused the car to stop on track. After being towed back and

repaired, losing 11 laps, the pair clawed their way back up the order, finally finishing seventh and second in Class D.

In a David vs Goliath fight, the Gazoo Racing Toyota Yaris GR media car of Ashley Oldfield, Mark Jones, Thomas Falkiner and Jeanette Kok-Kritzinger won the Index of Performance followed by the sister Yaris GR of Toyota executives Leon Theron, Anand Pather, Mario de Sousa and journalist Sean Nurse. The cars ran faultlessly, only requiring a change of brake pads just before 7pm and duly claimed eighth and 11<sup>th</sup> overall.

The class E win went to the Backdraft-Lexus of Mark Owens, Trevor Graham and Richard van Heerde who lost a fuel pump an hour into the race and dropped from a two-lap lead. They fought hard to overturn their 15-lap deficit, edging the Team Qhubani Backdraft of Fikile Holomisa/Baphumze Rubuluza/Xolela Njumbunxa by 11 seconds. The Qhubani team drove the second half of the race stuck in fifth gear making their tenth overall all the more remarkable.

Phillip Meyer/Mark Harvey/Dean Wolson brought their PPLE Group/Adapt Backdraft home in a solid 12<sup>th</sup> overall having lost 25 minutes with numerous stops to bleed the brakes, ending a slender 21 seconds behind the 11<sup>th</sup> placed Gazoo Yaris after nine hours of hard racing.

The coveted Index of Performance Championship nearly slipped through Pesty Racing's fingers as the Backdraft team of Harm and Barend Pretorius perfect run almost unravelled until a brief rain shower saw father Harm slither off the road, damaging a fuel overflow pipe and dislodging the fuel tank. Hasty repairs were made and the team duly claimed the Class E Championship as well as the Index silverware.

Another hard luck story belonged to the Team Retro Mates Backdraft of Meredith Willis/Michael Gaines/Manfred Schroder/Reg Sutton who was leading Class E when a left-front wheel worked loose in the fast turn four. The car was towed back to the pits and repaired, and the driving quad ended 14<sup>th</sup>.

Andrew Horne/Gerald Buys (Xena Chemicals Nash-VW) had high hopes for a strong result but were thwarted by a broken rose-joint which cost the pair 20 minutes, and later, they lost another 30 minutes replacing a wishbone. From 33<sup>rd</sup> they fought their way back to end 15<sup>th</sup> overall.

Franco di Matteo/Julian Familiaris/Warren Lombard had an eventful weekend. Their Mobil 1 Mustang V8 suffered engine failure in practice and the team packed up before deciding – just 15 minutes before the start of the race – to rent a spare Backdraft. No practice, no overalls or helmet, the trio borrowed or bought what they needed. There was only time to add fuel, and starting last, they raced to 16<sup>th</sup> overall and seventh in class E.

The Dolphin Engineering-entered Juno-Nissan also had a character building weekend. The team discovered a gap between the engine and bell-housing which took an all-nighter to strip and repair. The car ran well until a driveshaft broke, which cost 75 minutes to repair.

The #213 Bucketlist Racing Volkswagen Polo of Rob Clark, Pieter Zeelie and Johan de Bruyn ended 18<sup>th</sup> after suffering a broken engine mounting that took 90 minutes to repair.

Francis Carruthers/Steve Humble/Jonathan Thomas (Pilbeam MP84) ran as high as second place after two hours but tumbled down to 19<sup>th</sup> position by flag fall after Carruthers suffered a right rear suspension failure at the newly-renamed Sarel Sweep (turn five) travelling over 180km/h, losing 35 minutes while the car was recovered.

The Toyota Altezza team of Sergio Alvares/Cristian Bouche/Paul de Re/Rufino Fontes from Mozambique ended 20<sup>th</sup> after numerous technical issues including a broken fuel pump which cost 20 minutes to repair followed by another 15 minute loss to trace and fix a broken wire.

Gianmaria Gabbiani/Alberto Huober/Mags Govender brought their Dues Backdraft home 21<sup>st</sup> after a gearbox repair dropped them out of the running.

The final classified runners were the 4 Brits and a Bok of Craig Rapp, Robi Bernberg and Charles Ugo endured a weekend from hell. Ugo crashed at turn three which broke a gearbox and propshaft mounting which was repaired in 45 minutes. The team worked its way through four differentials, a gearbox, an engine and gearbox mounting on top of having to re-build the engine a week before the race.

Five teams competed in a one-hour dash which was won by Paul Hill (Kalex Aston Martin Vantage GT3), followed by Sun Moodley (Bigfoot Express Freight Mercedes-AMG GT3) five seconds adrift. Ray Farnham (Birkin 7-Opel) followed in third from Jan Willem (Ford Mustang) and Mike Verrier (Shelby CanAm).

Other leading retirements included Benjamin/Crisjan/Ben Morgenrood (Morgenrood Group Backdraft) who lost three hours replacing a broken differential. As the clock ticked down, Morgenrood peeled into the pits out of fuel. The service crew scrambled to fill the tank but ran out of time as the pit lane closes five minutes before the chequered flag, stranding the Backdraft at pit exit.

Five times Le-Mans winner Emanuele Pirro and his sons Cris and Goffredo retired with alternator failure while the Hennie Groenewald/Anthony Reid/Murray Shepherd machine retired with overheating issues. Le Mans winner Jan Lammers/Greg Mills/Tim Reddell succumbed to possible differential damage.

Mikaeel Pitamber/Mark Cronje/Nick Adcock retired their AidCall 247 Ligier-Honda JS53 with gearbox failure after a rear wing broke off while running second overall. The wing is mounted to the gearbox so the whole rear-end of the car had to be disassembled.

Mike McLaughlin/Steve Clark retired their Backdraft Slingshot suffered suspension failure pitched the car into the wall at Sarel Sweep.

Mike Verrier/Tate Bishop/Kai van Zijl retired their VW Golf with a broken engine, while Ricky/Jimmy/Gianni Giannoccaro/Ant Blunden retired their G&H Transport Mazda MX-5 with a broken engine.

Wayne Lotter/Steve Truter suffered a pit fire on Friday evening after a fuel system component broke. The car was towed away and remarkably returned to race, having replaced the burnt wiring and oil lines. After replacing wiring to the ECU and a crank sensor, the team withdrew.

2023 pre-season testing takes place in February with the opening round of the new season scheduled for March.

Issued by Eric Buijs (Media Manager SAES)

[eric@saeseries.com](mailto:eric@saeseries.com)

+27 82 66 246 10