

CHARL ARANGIES/CLINT WESTON WIN SPECTACULAR SA ENDURANCE SEASON OPENER

SA ENDURANCE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP – RD 1

ZWARTKOPS RACEWAY, 4TH MARCH

The South African Endurance National Championship got off to a thrilling start at Zwartkops Raceway with first and second places covered by just eight seconds after 209 laps and four hours of hard, hot racing.

Charl Arangies and Clint Weston brought their Stradale Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 home ahead of the hard-charging Stuart White/Xolile Letlaka Into Africa Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo. White was catching Arangies at two seconds per lap after the final safety car but ran out of time to challenge for the win.

In their first ever endurance race, rookies CJ Blackman, Jean Paul Briner and Anthony Hoare won the Index of Performance in their Tradecor Steel Backdraft-Lexus Roadster.

Practice and Qualifying:

Stradale Motorsport consistently set the pace during the four free practice sessions but when the clock ran for qualifying it was Jeffrey Kruger who blitzed the time sheets in his Auto Investments Ligier JS53-Honda.

Kruger had not driven the car all day until, with five minutes of the session remaining, he did one out lap and two flying laps before the chequered flag fell, locking out pole on his first lap and lowering the target by half a second on his second and final lap in a breathtaking display to set a time of 59.334 seconds around the 2.4km track.

Charl Arangies was the only other driver to set a sub-one minute lap, 0.543 seconds behind the Ligier, locking out the front row of the grid.

Michael Stephen, entered to run only the first hour in his Ultimate Outlaws McLaren MP4-12C slotted into third ahead of Mikael Pitamber/Gavin Cronje's MP17/Rico Barlow Ligier JS53-Honda.

Paul Hill (Kalex Aston Martin Vantage GT3) also entered in the one-hour race followed in fifth ahead of the Hein/Henk Lategan/Verissimo Tavares BBR Porsche 992 GT3 Cup. Mo Mia/Lee Thompson (Toys-R-Us Porsche 991 GT3 Cup) were just 0.019 seconds behind, setting up a tantalizing Stuttgart fight.

Capetonians Byron Mitchell/Peter van der Spuy took eighth on the grid in their Dolphin Racing Juno-Nissan followed by the defending SA Endurance Champion Kwanda Mokoena, teamed with Andrew Rackstraw in their MJR/Amandla Coal Audi R8 GT4.

Volkswagen Motorsport's Daniel Rowe/Keagan Masters claimed the Class D initiative in their factory-entered Polo SupaCup ahead of Jurie Swart/Karah Hill's Kalex VW Polo SupaCup.

Andrew Horne/Gerald Buys (Xena Chemicals Nash-VW) showed their intent by taking the Class E pole from the leading Backdraft of Benjamin/Crisjan/Ben Morgenrood.

Class E and Index Champions Harm/Barend Pretorius (Team Pesty Backdraft) were next up from Mark Owens/Mags Govender and the rest of the Backdraft entries.

During FP2 the Into Africa Lamborghini suffered a small pit lane fire– quickly extinguished – but the damage took the rest of the day to repair, and the team missed out on qualifying, relegating the pair to start from the back of the grid.

Race:

The first hour of the race was frenetic as the lead changed three times; Kruger was quickly swallowed up by Stephen in the McLaren but it was Stuart White who made the biggest impression, taking 18 minutes to carve his way through from the back of the grid and into the lead.

Once the one-hour cars had pitted, the race was a straight fight between the two GT3 cars. During a fortuitous safety car period, Stradale called Weston in for a splash and dash fuel stop so when his two hour stint was up, Arangies could jump in with enough fuel to take the lead around the 95-lap mark when the Into Africa car pitted.

Luck and timing plays a part in endurance racing, and Letlaka found himself two laps down on the leader thanks to pitting under racing conditions and coming out just as the safety car was deployed.

Once White was back in the car, he cut his deficit to one lap and as the race entered its final hour, he fought hard with Arangies, passing the Mercedes, only for Arangies to re-take the position.

White attacked again and made the move stick on the second time of asking. When a final safety car was deployed with 20 minutes remaining it seemed a challenge for victory was on the cards.

When racing resumed with 11 minutes left on the clock, the gap was down to 15 seconds and while White threw everything into the final minutes, lapping two seconds a lap faster than Arangies at times, the clock counted down to zero and the chase was over.

Third place went to the BBR Porsche 992 GT3 Cup car of Lategan, Tavares and Lategan. Henk Lategan flew directly from the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge to arrive in time to take the final stint. From desert to tarmac took a few laps to adjust to, and besides a clash with the Brandon Dean/Jarryd Wary Backdraft which caused the Porsche to spin in turn two, Lategan Jr was all smiles at the finish.

Lee Thompson and Mo Mia brought their Toys-R-Us Porsche home in fourth overall after a terrific scrap with the BBR car in the first hour.

Kwanda Mokoena and Andrew Rackstraw opened their 2023 account with fifth place. Mokoena was lucky, for he ran out of fuel on the last lap of his stint, with just enough in the reserve pump to bring the car back to the pits.

Daniel Rowe and Keagan Masters took class D honours and sixth overall after a trouble free race in their factory-run Polo, although they had to do an extra pitstop compared to their Bucket List rivals.

Christopher Pretorius/Gavin Rooke brought their Polo home in a fortunate seventh, as a driveshaft broke on the last lap. Pretorius managed to limp home to claim second in class.

Index of performance and Class E Champions Barend and Harm Pretorius won their class and ended eighth overall after nursing their car over the final 90 minutes with clutch issues.

Byron Mitchell/Peter van de Spuy brought their Juno home in ninth overall. The car suffered a sensor issue that caused the car to default into limp mode when it detected a high water temperature but mysteriously righted itself again each time it happened. Van de Spuy had a spin and beached the car on a kerb which triggered a safety car, losing several laps in the process.

With a combined age of 198 years, Tony and Brian Martin and Trevor Graham brought their factory Backdraft home in 10th overall and second in Class E ahead of the 11th placed endurance rookie Index winning trio.

The final classified runner was the PPLE/Adapt Backdraft entry of Mark Harvey, Phillip Meyer and Dean Wolson who stopped on the back straight with five minutes to go, a failed alternator the cause of the loss of power.

Retirements/Unclassified:

- The Morgenrood Backdraft lost 40 laps after a pin in the brake pedal box broke while leading
- Brandon Dean/Jarryd Wray lost time with multiple pitstops after the collision with Lategan's Porsche
- Karah Hill/Jurie Swart Kalex Polo: front wishbone broke, stranding the Polo in turn 7. The car was repaired and finished but was unclassified as they just missed out on the 75% rule.
- Mike McLaughlin/Steve Clark: crashed
- Mark Owens/Mags Govender: Spun lap 105
- Team Qhubani: gearbox lap 105
- Fabienne Lanz/Jevreen Reddy: Driveshaft lap 99
- Mikael Pitamber/Gavin Cronje: alternator lap 91
- Andrew Horne/Gerald Buys: suspension lap 29
- Riaan Botma/Jeffrey Kruger: overheating lap 22
- Morne Jurgens/Dean Hogg: electrical lap 10
- Mario and Claudio Rossi/Regard van Zyl: fire lap 2

The next round of the SA Endurance National Championship takes place at Red Star Raceway on 28 and 29 April.

Issued by Eric Buijs (Media Manager SAES)

eric@saeseries.com

+27 82 66 246 10