

## **TIGHT AT THE TOP AS SA ENDURANCE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP HEADS DOWN THE BACK STRAIGHT**

### **PREVIEW: SA ENDURANCE AND SAGT NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS**

#### **ZWARTKOPS RACEWAY, 20 – 21 OCTOBER 2023**

With 13 hours of racing remaining and 150 points still available in the 2023 SA Endurance National Championship, the championship table is crowded as three drivers are tied at the top of the log, with another three just five points adrift, setting the scene for spectacular race at Zwartkops Raceway on 21<sup>st</sup> October, where Southern African Endurance Series is offering free entry for spectators once again.

The Four-Hour Endurance race should be a straight fight between the Into Africa Lamborghini Huracan GT3 of Xolile Letlaka and Stuart White and Charl Arangies who shares his Stradale Motorsport Mercedes-AMG GT3 with Clint Weston this time around.

Arangies, partnered with Clint Weston won the opening round at Zwartkops back in March while the Into Africa team fought back with a spectacular win last time out at Aldo Scribante in August.

Third in the Championship standings, Hein and Henk Lategan along with Verissimo Tavares have been forced to miss this round as their star driver Henk injured his shoulder after rolling his Toyota Hilux in the SA Rally Raid Championship two weeks ago.

Arnold Neveling is two points adrift of the BBR Porsche trio but will sit out this round as Weston once more joins the squad, so his position in the standings is secure for now.

Byron Mitchell and Peter van der Spuy have enjoyed a solid season aboard their Dolphin Racing Juno-Nissan V6 and should be a contender for another big points haul, aiming to match their season best result of fourth overall at Red Star Raceway in April.

The thundering Backdraft Roadster, powered by a 7-litre Chev engine and driven with gusto by Mike McLoughlin and Steve Clark, is another open sportscar vying for a top five position and should be more than a match for the Juno.

Rounding out the Class A entry is the intriguing team, the Mozambique-based Korridas Racing driven by Marcos Rodrigues and Bruno Campos in a highly modified Audi RS4.

Heading the Class D battle and sixth overall is the factory Volkswagen Motorsport Polo GTi SupaCup of Daniel Rowe and Keagan Masters, fresh from his Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup duties in Europe – where he finished third in the Rookie standings - who head up the biggest Class D field of the year so far, but the factory squad will have their work cut out as looming large in the mirrors, is the similar Kalex VW Polo GTi SupaCup of lady racer Karah Hill and Jurie Swart, who bested their rivals in the Eastern Cape last time out.

That does not mean that the top two class rivals will have things all their own way as Charl Visser, who was crowned CompCare Volkswagen Polo Cup Champion last weekend, teams up with David and Roberto Franco in their Graphix Supply World Polo; Visser will be watched with particular interest as his next career move is likely to be in the GTC SupaCup series next year.

Bucketlist Racing have entered two Polos for brothers Anthony and Christopher Pretorius – Anthony raced to third in the Polo Cup Championship this year and is already a seasoned racer. The second entry is for Darren Winterboer, a veteran BMW Car Club racer and Mozambique racer Dylan Pragji.

Fabienne Lanz teams up with Regard van Zyl in her Target Corporate Karting VW Golf; known as the Iron Lady, Fabienne is the most successful female karting star in South Africa.

The prestigious Index of Performance Champion has turned into a fairy-tale season for rookies CJ Blackman and Jean-Paul Briner, who have raced their Tradecor Steel Backdraft Roadster into a 14-point lead over Philip Meyer, Dean Wolson and Mark Harvey's PPLE/Adapt Backdraft.

In the titanic fight over Class E honours, which is a championship-within-a-championship, the roles are reversed with the PPLE/Adapt trio holding a slender two point lead of the Tradecor pairing. Not out of the championship fight by a long shot is the current Index and Class E champions of father and son Harm and Barend Pretorius in the Team Pesty Backdraft, who are three points away from the top of the table.

One point further back is the Morgenrood trio of Ben, and sons Benjamin and Crisjan Morgenrood in their Morgenrood group Backdraft, who suffered a non-finish in the coastal round and will out to make for lost points.

Team Qhubani's Baphumze Rubuluza and Fikile Holomisa, usually a model of reliability and consistency, have endured a torrid season thus far with just one finish from three starts and will be aiming to turn their season around.

An exciting entry into the class E Backdraft battle that could set the proverbial cat amongst the pigeons is the Mobil 1 V8 pairing of freshly crowned champion Julian Familiaris and friend and rival Franco di Matteo, who know how to pedal big-engined cars very quickly.

Gavin Rooke and Mark Owens return for another tilt at some Class E points having been absent from the series for some time.

## **SAGT NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP**

Whatever happens in rounds seven and eight of the SAGT National Championship, the title will remain in Gqeberha. With five victories from six rounds, Michael Stephen has his first opportunity to win an unprecedented 19<sup>th</sup> National motorsport championship, while Team Ultimate Outlaws is on track to claim their first Team's Championship given

The Ultimate Outlaws Audi R8 GT3 has only been beaten by the reigning SAGT National Champion Silvio Scribante once this year; the usually Swiss-clock-reliable Cemza Cement Lamborghini Huracan GT3 has faltered twice this year leaving Silvio with an 11-point mountain to climb to close the gap to fellow Gqeberha racer Stephen.

Brother Aldo Scribante has powered his Scribante Concrete Lamborghini to six consecutive podiums and will be looking to maintain his form to keep his brother behind him in the standings as he pursues the Class A title.

Stuart White will be behind the wheel of the Into Africa Aston Martin Vantage GT3 and is more than capable of mixing it with the overall leaders, as demonstrated last weekend when he set an outright GT lap record around the 2.4km Zwartkops circuit in a time of 58.132 seconds!

In the ProAm class, Roelf du Plessis has an opportunity to take the class title lead followed closely by team owner Izak Spies, the pair of Ultimate Outlaws McLaren 650s evenly matched over a race distance with Du Plessis holding the upper hand over 'the boss' by 14 points. The class leader, Andrew Culbert will lose his three point lead as he has prior arrangements and won't be competing.

Xolile Letlaka is third in the ProAm class and put on a great showing in his Into Africa Lamborghini Huracan GT3 in the sprint series last weekend.

Sun Moodley has a wonderful opportunity to take the Am Class lead if he can replicate his Gqeberha performance in his Bigfoot Express Mercedes-AM GT3, where he added 51 points to his tally.

## **SUPPORT RACES**

The SAES programme offers spectators two additional race categories to enjoy with a bumper 31 car entry in the Silvercup series and a round of the brand new VW Rookie Cup, where tomorrow's stars learn their craft.

Chris Cronje leads the championship standings in his Dozer Earthmoving Toyota Spaceframe by a comfortable 57 points from Giles Darroch's very rapid GRD Motorsport VW Golf Mk 1 who is only three points ahead of Karel Stolts' Mazda RX7, who in turn is tied with Wayne Perreira's rapid VW Golf Mk.1

The all-new Volkswagen Rookie Cup is a new initiative to bridge the gap between karting and VW's successful Polo Cup one-make series. It is designed to bring youngsters aged between 14 and 16 into circuit racing and is based on the 1.0 litre VW Polo Vivo GT.

The winner of the VW Rookie Cup receives a full funded season in Polo Cup for the following season.

## **TIMETABLE**

The SAES Raceday will be livestreamed [https://bit.ly/SAES\\_Round4](https://bit.ly/SAES_Round4)

Friday's action covers four free practice sessions per category before the clocks start in earnest as official qualifying gets underway. SAGT gets the ball rolling at 15h30, followed by the VW Rookie Cup at 15h55. The SAE qualifying session is split into two 20-minute sessions starting at 16h20

Saturday sees an early start for the teenagers who have their first race at 08h10 followed by Silvercup qualifying at 08h25.

09h45 sees the first SAGT race get underway followed by the first Silvercup race and two VW Rookie Cup races, split by a lunch break with the Silvercup cars taking to the track at 12h50 for their second race.

The main event, the SAE 4-Hour race starts at 14h00 with the SAGT cars racing their second round of the day over the first hour of the endurance race.

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