

DRAMA AND HEARTBREAK AS CHARL ARRANGIES STORMS TO SA ENDURANCE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

REVIEW: SA ENDURANCE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP RD5

SA GT NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP RD 9 AND 10

KYALAMI GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT, 15 – 16 DECEMBER

The SAES Nine Hours of Kyalami delivered action and drama from the first minutes of the first free practice session on Friday until the dying minutes of the race on Saturday evening. An hour long rain shower and seven safety car periods added to the drama and constantly changing strategy calls the teams had to make.

Throughout all the on-track action in which he played a major role, Charl Arrangies emerged as the 2023 SA Endurance National Champion while the log leaders going into the blue riband event, Xolile Letlaka and Stuart White, endured heartbreak as their title hopes evaporated with mechanical issues after seven and a half hours of hard racing.

Nick Adcock, Michael Jensen, Leyton Fourie and Jonathan Thomas powered their Adjust4Sleep Nova-Proto to a superb victory after taking the lead in the fifth hour, ending seven laps ahead of the BBR Racing Porsche 911 GT3 Cup of Hein Lategan, Verissimo Tavares and Keagan Masters while Mike McLoughlin and Steve Clark powered their Backdraft Roadster from the back of the grid after failing to qualify on Friday to a stunning podium finish on Saturday evening.

Arrangies, teamed with Arnold Neveling and Kwanda Mokoena – was forced to change from his Mercedes-AMG GT3 to the team's Audi R8 GT3 after a practice accident – and clawed their way back into title contention after a 45 minute delay to repair a sideshaft to end fourth overall after the championship appeared to be a lost cause.

In his first season of endurance racing, rookie Jean-Paul Briner (Tradecor Steel Backdraft) was crowned the SA Endurance Index of Performance National Champion after their nearest challenger Daniel Rowe retired from the race.

Toyota Gazoo Racing won their second consecutive Index of Performance – this time with a Toyota 86 - following a sterling performance from motoring journalists including 86 Cup champion Setshaba Mashigo, Chad Luckoff, Mark Jones and Dennis Droppa.

SAE Practice and Qualifying:

In the opening minutes of the first free practice session on Friday morning Briner spun his Backdraft in the Esses just as Kwanda Mokoena powered his Stradale Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 through the corner. Briner engaged reverse gear just the Mercedes took the corner; the Merc struck the Backdraft a glancing blow with enough force to destroy the right front suspension.

The Stradale team, fighting for the SAE crown, quickly brought their Audi R8 GT3 from the Vereeniging base and duly took to qualifying.

Leyton Fourie powered the Nova Proto, powered by a 5-litre Mustang engine, to pole position by 0.114 seconds from Stuart White's Into Africa Lamborghini Huracan GT3. Fourie's time was a new unofficial lap

record for Kyalami. Neveling put the Audi into third ahead of Keagan Masters' BBR Porsche, Byron Mitchell, Peter van de Spuy and Nian du Toit's Play.co.za Juno-Nissan, which was plagued with overheating issues.

Daniel Rowe put his Class D title aspirations in pole position after qualifying his Volkswagen Motorsport Polo SupaCup half a second quicker than the Karah Hill, Jurie Swart and Keegan Campos Kalex Polo.

The visiting Korridas Racing VW Golf of Bruno Campos – who flew in from Portugal for the event – shared his car with Marcos Rodrigues and Joao Rebelo Martins but suffered a broken timing belt in FP2 and a broken gear selector in FP3. The team spent Saturday morning scouring Johannesburg for a replacement part, and eventually rebuilt the gearbox.

Class E saw the defending champions and class leaders, Harm and Barend Pretorius put their Team Pesty Backdraft ahead of the pack, followed by the PPLE/Adapt entry of Philip Meyer, Mark Harvey and Dean Wolson and the Mad Max entry of Brandon Dean, Barry Ingle and Fabio Tafani. Tafani suffered a right-front wheel failure in FP2, pitching the orange Backdraft off the track.

Nine Hours of Kyalami

As the lights turned green, Stuart White blasted his Into Africa Lamborghini into the lead before turn one and blasted into a lead he would hold over the next hour.

Just four minutes into the race the first safety car was activated after Craig Jarvis, running in the 1-hour Dash, spun his car in the final turn. Back under green flag conditions, White relentlessly built a solid lead, pitting on lap 35 handing the car to team boss Xolile Letlaka, a lap after Arangies in second place handed his car to Mokoena.

The safety cars played into the Stradale team's hand, benefitting from pitting under safety car conditions while the Into Africa squad pitted under full racing conditions in what was a lucky break for Arangies' team.

The Nova Proto, with Adcock behind the wheel held station in third from the BBR Porsche and the McLaughlin Backdraft, who had rocketed from the back of the grid. Daniel Rowe held a remarkable sixth overall in his works VW Polo with the Morgenrood trio of Ben Sr, Benjamin and Crisjan leading Class E in their Morgenrood Group Backdraft.

The fight was on as the second hour ended with Mokoena maintaining a one second lead over Letlaka's Lamborghini with the Nova Proto an ever-present menace in the Lambo's mirrors. The Morgenrood's held sway in Class E but Richard van Heerde and Gavin Rooke had moved into second place.

Over the next hour the status quo remained unchanged, while the Nova Proto, with Jonothan Thomas at the wheel, slipped past Letlaka for second place in spite of a wild triple spin exiting Sunset. The storm clouds were building in the west, threatening rain...

By five pm, the Nova Proto was still flying, perfect strategy and driving from the trio gave them the lead from Letlaka with Stradale **now** in fourth.

20 minutes later and Kyalami was awash. Cars tip-toed around, heading for the pits for wet-weather tyres. But minutes later, Arangies was in the pits for 50 minutes, the Audi suffered a broken siveshaft. The team contemplated retiring from the race but electing to push on, now down in seventh overall after the repairs were completed.

With 90 minutes remaining, Arangies was still in sixth place and the championship all but over.

Another safety car was called out after Fabio Tafani spun the Mad Max Backdraft into the wall at turn two and out of the race with heavy rear damage while Trevor Graham aquaplaned his factory Backdraft into the wall at the bottom of the mineshaft, fortunately with only cosmetic damage.

The circuit remained damp as the sun set the sky alight at 6pm with Michael Jensen at the helm of the Nova Proto and White holding second in the tricky conditions, aware they just needed to finish to clinch the title but only five seconds adrift of the lead. Lategan was holding onto his podium position with Steve Clark in the Backdraft in fourth ahead of the remarkable factory VW with Jonathan Mogotsi behind the wheel.

The clock headed towards hour seven with the title seemingly going to the Into Africa squad as Pitamber climbed aboard for a short stint before handing the car back to the experienced White for the final stint. No sooner was the international star in the Lambo when the car ground to a halt at 19.22. The car was recovered back to the pits where a broken alternator was discovered. Located at the front of the engine, it is difficult to remove and the team plunged down the order while the mechanics set about a repair.

Four minutes later, the factory Volkswagen Polo spun in the apex of the final turn, Charl Visser stranded lengthwise across the track having suffered terminal crank sensor failure. Verissimo Tavares running second overall, was the first driver on the scene and managed to avoid the stricken Polo by a whisker. This brought out yet another safety car.

For Rowe to win the championship, The Kalex Karah Hill/Jurie Swart/Keegan Campos Polo had to win, and they were languishing in fifth in class D after a turbo blew.

With an hour remaining, Fourie was serene in the lead with Masters a comfortable second from McLaughlin's Backdraft and Neveling in the Audi.

Yet more drama lay in wait. McLaughlin pitted from third overall with 15 minutes remaining and was pushed back into its box while the team frantically fixed both the tail and brake lights to comply with the rules, losing nine minutes but safe from the charging Audi.

The drama wasn't over yet, for with 13 minutes remaining, Neveling coasted the Stradale Audi into the pits with a dead engine. The team pushed the car to their pit box and quickly established that the fuel pump had broken and switched to the spare pump, allowing Neveling to roar back out after losing 2½ minutes.

Down at the Into Africa pit, work on replacing the alternator was complete and with minutes remaining before the pit lane was closed five minutes before the race end, the mechanics were frantically prepping the car to get out. White was strapped in, the car fired up but the countdown clock was into the four minute zone and the car was stopped from leaving the pits and classified as a retirement. The championship for Letlaka and White, was over.

Adcock was delighted with their win, his first nine-hour race win since 2015. "The car ran like clockwork. We got pole position, set the fastest lap and gave the Nova Proto its first win in South Africa."

Masters duly brought the BBR Porsche home in an untroubled second place, earning Lategan the SAE Class A Championship in the process. Masters elected to run slicks on the damp track for his final stint, reading the conditions perfectly.

After a raft of issues, the Play.co.za Juno-Nissan came home in fifth position overall. Van der Spuy started the race before handing over to Mitchell, who had a right rear tyre explode heading into the fast turn one. He tried to limp around but with no airflow, the car overheated so the quick-thinking Mitchell deliberately parked the car at the Esses, knowing his car would be recovered without damaging the engine and which brought out a safety car.

The Juno team took on wet tyres on the drying track and did an extra pitstop for slick tyres, one of which punctured with two laps remaining and finished on the rim.

Richard van Heerde and Gavin Rooke won class E and ended sixth overall after managing brakes which left them to 'lift-and-coast' to see the chequered flag; with enough of a lead over the Morgenrood trio, the win was safe.

The Morgenrood trio ended seventh overall, which was enough to win the Class E Championship after a solid drive at the front of the pack. The team earned two drive-through penalties after Ben Sr overtook a car under yellow flag conditions, and Benjamin failed to stop when the pit exit light was red. Over the last hour, the team had dropped to third as a result of nursing a cracked brake rotor but on the final lap, Benjamin put in a mighty lap to reclaim second in Class E from the Anglo-Italian trio of Gian Maria Gabbiani, Mark Owens and Alberto Huober.

Gabbiani scorched into the lead at the start but overcooked their Maniac Line Backdraft's brakes, forcing a slower pace. A misfire in hour three robbed the car of power while Owens had a spin down the main straight after aquaplaning in the rain while trundling behind the safety car.

The Cape –based father and son Albert and Oliver Hintenaus brought their Coastal Engineering BMW home in ninth overall and the Class D victory.

Mark Harvey, Philip Meyer and Dean Wolson overcame a broken rose joint on their PPLE/Adapt Backdraft 90 minutes into the race. It took four laps to repair and the car ran perfectly for the remainder of the race.

Trevor Graham and Karshan Naidoo, having lost three laps taping up their broken bodywork after Graham's spin in the rain, claimed 11th after a circumspect drive in the changeable conditions.

Manuel Grandi and Dan Hirsh suffered a blown engine in free practice but once a new motor was installed, drove well but suffered water in the engine management system, requiring the car to be towed back to the pits, losing numerous laps in the process but classified in 12th place.

With the Index of Performance Championship at stake, Jean-Pierre Briner, CJ Blackman and Anthony Hoare ended 13th after spending the first hour stuck behind slower cars. They had a gear selector problem, leaving the Tradecor Backdraft with only second gear, but once repaired, they ran well allowing Briner to clinch the Index of Performance Championship.

Toyota Gazoo Racing entered a pair of 86s, which spent nine hours running in formation. The motoring journalist-crewed 86 of Setshaba Mashigo, Chad Luckoff, Mark Jones and Dennis Droppa won the Index of Performance and 14th overall while the Toyota management crew of Mario de Sousa, Anand Pather and Brandon Staniforth ended 15th and third in the Index standings. The Toyotas ran with original tyres and brakes for the entire race, with just one change of front tyres needed late in the race after picking up debris after a Backdraft forced the car off the track.

Outgoing Class E and Index Champions Team Pesty had a race to forget. Leading the E class chase by one point going into the season finale, Harm and Barend Pretorius were initially involved in a close race with the Morgenroods before a lower control arm broke at 7pm, ending their title challenge on the spot.

Fikile Holomisa, Baphumze Rubuluza and Njumbuxa brought their Team Qhubani Backdraft home in 17th position after suffering fuel feed issues throughout, costing around five seconds a lap to their rivals.

Davide and Rob Franco were joined by Polo Cup racer Jason Loosemore in their Graphix Supply World VW Polo SupaCup. They lost two hours changing a clutch just after 6pm, dropping the rapid trio to the bottom of the timesheets.

The final classified runner was the Kalex car of Hill, Swart and Campos. A turbo blew just before 4pm, taking 86 minutes to replace. Once running, they encountered a fuel pump issue while Karah had a quick spin in the rain.

The Korridas Racing entry from Mozambique eventually found a new gear selector for their car and rebuilt the gearbox, joining the race 3½ hours after it had started. They then had three broken left sideshafts to deal with, retiring the car when they ran out of spares.

1-Hour Dash

The 1-Hour Dash is a race within the SA Endurance Championship and attracted 10 entries. The first major casualty was the new Xena Chemicals Ligier-Honda which suffered catastrophic engine failure in the first minutes of the first free practice session.

Nicky Dicks took pole in his Curvent Porsche 996 RSR, 0.15 seconds ahead of Izak Spies' Ultimate Outlaws McLaren Mp412-C, some 2½ seconds up on the Harp Motorsport Juno-Nissan of Francis Carruthers. Jimmy Giannoccaro took fourth on the grid in his G&H Transport Lamborghini Gallardo ahead of the Class D Bucketlist Racing VW Polo Supercup of Anthony Pretorius.

Kyle Robinson (AF Fans VW Polo SupaCup) and Mike Verrier's AidCall VW Gold rounded out the grid.

Nicky Dicks made no mistake and swept into an unchallenged lead chased by Carruthers in the Juno, nearly a minute behind after dealing with two separate gearbox issues.

Anthony Pretorius came home in a fighting third, 10 seconds adrift of the purpose-built sportscar. Kyle Robinson and Mike Verrier had their own battle while Jimmy Giannoccaro retired his Lamborghini after 45 minutes with an electrical problem that affected the gearbox.

SA GT

The final rounds of the SA National Championship saw two GTO entries join the regular competitors with Joseph Ellerine a last-minute entry in a WCT Engineering-run Ginetta G57-Chev which duly took pole position.

Michael Stephen, with his eye on his first GT3 title, lined up on the front row followed by an on-form Andrew Culbert in his Bigfoot Express Mercedes-AMG GT3 and the outgoing SA GT champion Silvio Scribante completing the second row of the grids in his Cemza Cement Lamborghini Huracan GT3.

Craig Jarvis planted his Ginetta on row three with Aldo Scribante (Scribante Concrete Lamborghini Huracan GT3 for company. Sun Moodley (Bigfoot Express Mercedes-AMG GT3) and Roelf du Plessis in his Ultimate Outlaws McLaren MP4 12C.

When the green lights flashed on, Ellerine blasted the Ginetta into the lead and never looked back. What made the youngster's performance even more remarkable was he'd driven the car for the first time in the second free practice session only a few hours earlier. "It's a phenomenal car to drive", he enthused at the finish. "It redefines 'on rails and handles like a go-kart on steroids."

Stephen needed to finish the race to clinch the title – his 19th national championship – which he duly did.

Craig Jarvis was in third position when a cam sensor on the Chevy motor failed, leaving the car stranded on the side of the circuit.

Aldo Scribante had a furious battle with du Plessis swapping places over a number of laps before the black Lambo pulled away.

The second SA GT race took place over the first hour of the SA Endurance Nine Hour race. Michael Stephen romped home with a 26 second lead over a much better race for the Scribante brothers Silvio and Aldo who brought their Lamborghini's home in second and third places.

Both Scuderia Scribante cars battled with understeer during the race but were happy with their weekend's work.

"It's a fantastic way to end the season with another double win, said Stephen. "Traffic was a challenge; at times there were five cars I had to pick my way through but my aim was to stay out of trouble. I didn't fight with cars that had no bearing on my race. It worked out perfectly."

Andrew Culbert brought his Bigfoot Express Mercedes-AMG GT3 home in fourth overall, clinching the ProAm Championship for the second year in a row. Izak Spies and Roelf du Plessis had a royal battle between them. When Spies moved aside to let faster SAE cars through, Du Plessis pounced and got ahead of Spies but the team leader got the position back a few laps later. After the race, Spies reported the car's cockpit reached 60°C!

Moodley rounded out the SA GT finishers with another Am Class win, describing both his races as "awesome". Ellerine, so dominant the previous day, retired his Ginetta after 35 minutes with a collapsed wheel bearing.

The 2024 SA Endurance and SA GT National Championship season starts at Kyalami on 8 and 9 March

Issued by Eric Buijs (Media Officer SAES)

eric@saeseries.com

+27 82 66 246 10