

RED STAR RACEWAY HOSTS THE SIZZLING SEASON OPENER FOR SAE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Preview: SAE National Championship Rd 1

Red Star Raceway, Delmas, 9th March.

Sticking with the format that proved so popular last year, the SA Endurance National Championship (SAE) will get the 2024 season underway at Red Star Raceway, Delmas on March 9, where good food, excellent spectator viewing, and a family-friendly environment make it ideal for 'a day at the races'.

It is going to be a bumper season - with 29 hours of racing in total – as it signals the start of a chase for four National Championship titles and offers fans six race meetings – one more than last year – and the bonus of having all rounds televised live on SuperSport in addition to the live streaming on YouTube.

The 'newbie' in the National Championship series is the Backdraft V8 Roadster category that previously ran as Class E and these potent open top cars make up the majority of entries for the Red Star event.

"We certainly are looking forward to this," says Francois Pretorius, Team Manager for Pesty Racing, which won the class title in 2022. "We have a fresh engine for the season and are all geared up and ready to go.

"Moving up to being a National Championship has galvanized everybody in the class and we are expecting some tough battles as the season unfolds. It is absolutely fantastic to be part of a series backed by a manufacturer so passionate and committed to the racing and all kudos must go to Tony and Brian Martin for all they have done."

With Ben and Chrisjan Morgenrood having elected not to defend the Class E title they won last year; it is a truly open field where every point will count.

Harm and Barend Pretorius will again campaign for Pesty Racing but will find themselves in close contact with Kishoor and Mikael Pitamber (Backdraft Racing), the African Sun Lodge pairing of Rosh Sooful and Denver Branders with the ever-improving Team Qhubani duo of Fikile Holomisa and Baphumze Rubuluza who are always in the mix.

The Pple Group/Adapt Signage Roadster will appear with three drivers for the 4-Hour event in the hands of Philip Meyer, Dean Wolson and Mark Harvey, while lady racer Fabienne Lanz will contest the Red Star event with another lady racer, Lonika Martens at selected other races depending on her motorsport commitments.

Others to watch for in the Class are Trevor Graham and Dan Hirsch, Gavin Rooke/Richard van Heerde, Tradecore Racing's CJ Blackman and Jean-Paul Briner and the Mark Owens/Mashego Setshaba pairing.

In the thick of it and upfront doing battle with the Class A cars will be the Chevy-powered Backdraft Slingshot of Mike McLoughlin and Steve Clark.

And, talking of title chasing in the SAE Championship, Xolile Letlaka and Stuart White in the Into Africa Mining Lamborghini GT3 are out for revenge after seeing their 2023 championship slip away 90 minutes before the of the Nine Hours of Kyalami in November.

However, they will be up against the car that took the national SA GT championship – the Michael Stephen Ultimate Outlaws Audi GT3. This Audi Gt3 will mark Paul Hill's debut in the car, together with current GTC Supacup Champion, Brad Liebenberg.

Porsche is represented by former rally and touring car driver and current defending Class A Champion, Hein Lategan in his BBR Racing 992 Cup car, partnered by Verissimo Tavares and Dakar driver Henk Lategan.

Of huge importance to the future of the sport is the massive investment by Sam Hammond and Trinity in a multi-car team that is specifically geared to developing young local talent, and Samlin Racing will kick off with a three-car attack at Red Star.

"I think there is a need for a steppingstone. I believe there is a need for youngsters to go to a GT 4 like what we have, and then experience that in endurance. And then from there, the transition is much easier to a GT 3 car and then from there to go overseas," says Sam Hammond.

Farhaan Basha, who moves up from Polo Cup and will share a Lamborghini with Damian Hammond, says: "It's been a big step up for us, but we're really, really excited for it."

Nathan Hammond and Dawie van der Merwe will share a Trinity VW Polo also backed by Trinity – the 200-kW beast likely to be the cat among the pigeons on the tight Red Star circuit.

He is excited about the new Samlin Racing team – that aims for five cars during the year – saying: "I think South Africa has got the talent. The only problem we've got here is the talent doesn't always have the money backing to be able to get into the circuit racing and to be able to drive the Polos, the Lambos, and the GT 3's.

"I mean if you ever look at the guys that have gone overseas already from South Africa, we can step up. So that's what we are trying – to provide a steppingstone so they can build themselves up to one day being able to prove themselves once they get overseas."

Sam Hammond adds: "We have four Super Trofeo Lamborghinis, original racing factory cars from Lamborghini, which we are aiming to run. Some of them will be run with gentleman drivers and some of them will be run with youngsters. Then we've got a Super Polo that will be run by two youngsters in Endurance Series competing in clause C. So, we should have five cars effectively on the grid." Sam Hammond will share a second Lamborghini with Wayne Richard Roach for the Red Star event.

The SA GT cars will run two races, a 30-minute sprint and a 1-hour, with the latter being the first hour of the SAES endurance event and interesting entries in that will see the likes of Roelf du Plessis (Ultimate Outlaws) taking on the supercars along with the Xena Chemicals/ Camtech Ligier of Andrew Horne and Top Mobil 1 V8 racers Franco di Matteo in an adapted Ford Mustang V8 in class A hoping to give the European brands a run for their money.

The Kalex VW Golf will again be in contention in the hands of Karah Hill and Juries Swart competing in Class D and up against the David and Roberto Franco Graphix Supply World Polo, while the Mozambique-based Korridas Racing entry driven by Marcos Rodrigues and Bruno Campos eschews their Class A Audi RS4 to compete in Class D, also in a VW.

Dunlop is now the exclusive tyre supplier for the series with ATS Motorsport Supplies handling the tyre service side and this could play a role as teams adjust and set themselves up for the different tracks and surfaces during the season.

The support racing for the SA Endurance Series will again be provided by the huge field of Silvercup 2.0 cars that produce hugely entertaining action with a full mix of Nissan, Audi Renault, Volkswagen, BMW, Toyota and Honda nameplates all vying to be first across the line. However, this time out, they will race on the short circuit configuration which will take away any straight line advantage.

Final practice and Qualifying at Red Star Raceway start from 07:30 on Saturday, March 9 with the first SA GT race scheduled for around 10am and the formation lap for the 4-Hour race at 12 noon.

Tickets are R100 **per car** for the day's racing.

Issued by Eric Buijs (Media Officer SAES)

eric@saeseries.com

+27 82 66 246 10