**INTENSE VW CHALLENGE THRILLS AT KYALAMI**

*Brilliant VW Challenge curtailed by scary racing accident*

The PABAR VW Challenge delivered a thrilling first heat at Kyalami before the second race was canned following a frightening first lap accident. Rory Atkinson came back to take the first race win in his now Class X car from Class A brothers Bevin and Wayne Masters, while Stuart Mack took Class B and Andy Gossman C. Second to Gossman in the opening race, Michael Zapheriou had an enormous accident towards the end of the opening lap of the second heat. The race was stopped and later canned as Zapheriou was rushed to hospital.

The drama however started long before the races. In a one of two significant pre-race developments, the new turbo cars that raced in Class A last time out were regrouped into Class X from Kyalami, pending MSA ratification for them to run as Class T in future. In another surprise, reigning and multiple Class A champion Rory Atkinson appeared in the driving seat of the Blue Belt Pozidrive Class X car that Chris Dale drove to a double win last time out, and promptly put it on pole position.

Atkinson emerged almost a full two seconds clear of the best of the class A cars, Masters brothers Wayne’s Performance Masters car, and Bevin’s CPS Warehouse machine. A feisty Mike Barbaglia’s Class X PABAR Polo was next up ahead of Class A lad Dean Ross’ Norbrake car, Luigi Ferro’s Eco Simply Solar Class X machine and Class A trio, Miguel Dias’ Performance Masters Polo, MDS Consulting lad Mydi Mfana and PSA Africa lass Nicole Lombard.

The other off-track development was Ethan Coetzee arriving at Kyalami as Class B champion after a very late MSA hearing decided in the JRT Racing Experience lad ‘s favour after the opening 2024 round had raced. He would line up sixth behind Kyalami expert Stuart Mack’s 3-pot litre turbo Nathan's Polo, half a second clear of Mo Karodia’s new Fast 5 Polo sedan, and regular hatches in Durban Dubcorp lad Shiren Rajpaul, Anthony Lessing’s Csol car and Stelio Nousias’ Fourbuy Wholesale version.

Bond Gallery lass Charisse Piazza Musso and Eco Simply’s Tinahe Ncube shared the inside fourth row ahead of Platinum driver Jacques Hayes and Coating Techniques rookie Josh Wilford in tenth. ARD man Dewald Theron, Ukwazi lad Adriaan de Beer, Francis Aldrich’s VaporWorx car, MLP driver Martin de Beer, and Ross Campbell’s JRT Polo followed after Former C champion man, Ian Walker failed to set a time in his Mellow Velo entry,

Class A and B may have delivered dominant pole positions, but it was close in Brat Pack C where Andy Gossman’s Goose machine pipped Insurisk lad Michael Zapheriou to the top spot. 16-year old’s Chris Tait’s GoPro and Judd Bertholdt’s Sizanzi Plastics Vivo were next up from JRT dad Mitch Coetzee, Insurisk duo Dimitri Zapheriou and Kyle Petersen.

Philip Croeser’s ATE car followed from VMS lad Tyron Pillay, Rezcom driver Dino Smit and Cody Pillay in another Insurisk Vivo.

The grid however looked a little different with the Class A cars in front and the non-points scoring X cars behind. Bevin and Wayne Masters sat on the front row from Dean Ross, Miguel Dias and Mydi Mfana, with Rory Atkinson, Mike Barbaglia and Luigi Ferro behind. It never took too long for Atkinson to split Wayne and Bevin Masters up front, but it took him a while to get ahead. Once ahead, Rory was gone, while Bevin stole second from brother Wayne. Barbaglia and Ferro followed from Mfana, Dias and Nicole Lombard after Dean Ross found trouble.

Stuart Mack left the rest to fight over the scraps in Class B. In an entertaining battle, Stelio Nousias made his presence felt to keep Mo Karodia, Shiren Rajpaul, Anthony Lessing Ethan Coetzee, and Charisse Piazza Musso honest. Karodia and his sedan eventually broke away from the chasing hatchbacks to claim second from Nousias, Rajpaul, Piazza Musso Lessing and Coetzee. Josh Wilford continued his rise to seventh ahead of Tinahe Ncube, Dewald Theron, Nicole Lombard, Ross Campbell, Martin de Beer, and Francis Aldrich, after Adriaan de Beer, Jacques Hayes and Ian Walker failed to go the distance.

The Brat Pack entertained as always, but there seemed little Andy Gossman’s young rivals could do to actually challenge him. That in spite of the chasing Michael Zapheriou, Chris Tait and Judd Bertholdt all sitting within a second or two behind, all the way. Behind them, Philip Croeser had a good race to climb to fifth from Mitch Coetzee, Dimitri Zapheriou, Kyle Petersen, Tyron Pillay, Dino Smit, and Cody Pillay.

Rory Atkinson had it all to do all over again as he started well behind Bevin and Wayne Masters on the segregated grid. The second race Class B grid also looked different with Ethan Coetzee on pole from Mo Karodia and Anthony Lessing. Christopher Tait started the Brat Pack spat from pole position over Andy Gossman and Michael Zapheriou. It was however not to be.

Coming through the fast kink behind the Kyalami pits on the first lap, Michael Zapheriou appeared to be edged off line by a slowing A car at the same time as encountering an unexpectedly slick surface. His Vivo snapped sideways, speared across the track, and slammed head-on into the wall with frightening force. The spinning car then bounced back across the racing line. Neither Andy Gossman nor Judd Bertholdt could avoid the juggernaut, which finally came to rest amid all the debris spread across of the track.

The race was immediately red flagged and Michael extracted from the wreckage and rushed to Sunninghill Hospital. “Michael underwent emergency surgery Saturday evening and remains in ICU in an induced coma in a serious, but stable condition ahead of further assessment,” VW Challenge Chairman Philip Croeser confirmed. “On behalf of all of motorsport, MSA and the PABAR VW Challenge, we wish Michael a speedy recovery as we keep him, his family and friends in our prayers.”

The race was not re-started following a lengthy clean-up operation and will likely be run as a third heat at a future round. PABAR VW Challenge heads to its third round at Red Star Raceway in Delmas, Mpumalanga on Saturday 11 May.

*\*Running on Dunlop tyres supported by ATS Motorsport Supplies, oiled by Habot Performance Lubricants, and stopped by ATE Brakes, PABAR VW Challenge also salutes partners, Platinum Wheels, Norbrake, Eco Simply Solar, Insurisk insurance brokers, Van der Linde Developments, MDS Consulting Engineers, FSS Logistics and galetti.co.za property.*