**SA TOURING CARS THRILL ALDO SCRIBANTE**

*Cape racers to the fore and great Touring Car racing aplenty*

Gqeberha’s midseason South African Touring Cars round proved something of a Cape Town flavoured turn-up of the books at Aldo Scribante. Province lad Julian van der Watt and maiden winner, Jozi rookie Anthony Pretorius shared the top class honours. Two more Capetonians, another first time winner in Tate Bishop and compatriot Charl Visser meanwhile shared the SATC SupaCup wins. The results however had little effect on the championship scenario as second for the day in both classes, Robert Wolk and Keegan Campos consolidated their respective title advantages.

There was a double Capetonian turn-up for the books in qualifying when Julian van der Watt put his Investchem Volkswagen Golf GTI TC onto pole in the Global Touring Cars, and young Tate Bishop put his Angri SupaPolo onto his maiden pole position in the SATC SupaCup. Saood Variawa lined up second among Touring Cars in his Toyota Gazoo Racing Corolla, from championship leader Robert Wolk’s Chemical Logistics WCT BMW 128ti TC in third. Gazoo Corolla pair Michael van Rooyen and Nathi Msimanga, rookie privateer Anthony Pretorius’ OMP LTR Corolla and rookie Andy Schofield’s FlySafair Chemical Logistics BMW 128ti TC made up the grid.

Besides Bishop’s pole position surprise, there was a SATC SupaCup twist in the tail in the lead up to the Gqeberha weekend. Keegan Campos was handed back the points he’d been docked by an alleged jump start at Kyalami by an MSA courtroom decision. That reshuffled the leaderboard to place Campos ahead in the championship standings. In other SupaCup news, with Sa’aad Variawa coming of SATC SupaCup age and able to now race his second Toyota Gazoo Racing SupaStarlet, the SupaCups would race on their own for the first time in heat 2.

Behind them, Bishop would line up alongside Volkswagen Motorsport lad Jonathan Mogotsi, Keegan Campos’ Campos Transport car, Charl Visser in the other Motorsport entry and Jason Campos Turn 1 Insurance car in an all VW SupaPolo top six. Bradley Liebenberg was the best of the Gazoo SupaStarlets in seventh from Masters driver Jean-Pierre van der Walt’s Platinum Wheels entry, Nicolaos Vostanis and Dean Venter’s VDN Auto M-Town SupaPolos, Sa’aad Variawa in the other SupaStarlet and racing lass Karah Hill’s Kalex SupaPolo.

Julian van der Watt made a solid start to move ahead at the start of the opening South African Touring Car race to lead Robert Wolk, but Wolk had a big moment exiting the esses to slip to the back of the pack. Nathi Msimanga was the big winner through all that. A great start combined with Wolk’s woes saw Nathi up to second from van Rooyen, Pretorius, Variawa, Schofield and Wolk, who was soon back past his teammate.

Msimanga kept van der Watt under pressure, but Nathi out-braked himself into turn 1, lost the rear around the outside, and clipped the hapless Pretorius en route to embed himself in the inside tyre wall. That left van der Watt to cruise home to a lights to flag win off pole position from van Rooyen, with Variawa third and Wolk all over his rear. Andy Schofield picked up fifth as the battle scarred Pretorius limped home sixth.

Tate Bishop made no mistakes among the SupaCup entries, getting away well and resisting pressure throughout to keep Jonathan Mogotsi at bay with Keegan and Jason Campos next up from Jean-Pierre Van Der Walt and Bradley Liebenberg. Charl Visser ended seventh after a mid-race off in the esses, from Nicolas Vostanis Sa'aad Variawa, Karah Hill and Dean Venter.

With the top class South African Touring Cars racing alone in heat 2, Anthony Pretorius’s first race woes were repaid in a pleasant backhand as he found himself on pole position for the reverse grid race 2 from Andy Schofield, Robert Wolk, Saood Variawa, Michael van Rooyen and Julian van der Watt. Pretorius got away well as Wolk jumped to second, but his attempt to pass Pretorius went awry to see him fighting to keep in third after van Rooyen took the gap to pass him.

There was no stopping young Pretorius however as he opened up a little gap on the battling van Rooyen and Wolk with Variawa, Msimanga and van der Watt in their own battle for fourth. The big battle was for second as Wolk pushed van Rooyen back towards Pretorius up front. Wolk finally pounced on van Rooyen at the hairpin around mid-distance and set off after Pretorius with the three Gazoo cars in pursuit. Wolk put in a series of blistering laps to close the gap as van Rooyen and Msimanga fought for third.

It was too little too late however, as a delighted Pretorius held on to win from the charging Wolk, who did his title aspirations no harm at all in second. Van Rooyen, Msimanga, Variawa, van der Watt and Schofield followed. With two rather different results, Michael van Rooyen emerged the overall South African Touring Car winner for the day from race 1 winner Julian van der Watt and Robert Wolk, with Variawa fourth from Schofield, race 2 winner Pretorius and Msimanga.

Tate Bishop was once again on pole for the historic first standalone SATC SupaCup race in heat 2 and he and compatriot Charl Visser arrived in turn 1 side by side. Visser still managed to turn his car after a very late braking attempt and went ahead, with Bishop, Jonathan Mogotsi and Keegan Campos in close attendance. Bradley Liebenberg, Jason Campos, a feisty Nicolas Vostanis and Jean-Pierre van der Walt chased ahead of Karah Hill and Dean Venter, with Sa’aad Variawa at the back after slipping off in turn 2.

The top four stayed close until an incident in the esses saw Keegan Campos off and all over the place as Liebenberg took advantage. Keegan repaid the favour around the outside of the final turn back to fourth and Jason Campos soon followed his brother through. Bishop was all over Visser up front, with Mogotsi and Keegan edging ever closer until the top four were once again nose to tail to set up a riveting final two tours.

Visser used the widest SupaPolo in the race to great effect as Mogotsi and Keegan used that to find a way past Bishop. Then Keegan Campos went round the outside of turn 1 to pass Mogotsi through the esses, before Bishop also found his way back past Jonathan through the sweep. That left Mogotsi and Jason Campos to make contact as they sped to the line to cause the two to swerve wildly as Jonathan crossed the line wide across the grass.

The upshot was that Charl Visser took a brave lights to flag win from Keegan Campos, Tate Bishop, Jason Campos and Jonathan Mogotsi. Liebenberg ended sixth with the best seat in the house in the first Toyota from van der Watt, Vostanis, Venter, Hill and Variawa. An overjoyed pole man and race 1 winner Tate Bishop meanwhile did enough to take the overall win from Keegan Campos, Jonathan Mogotsi, Jason Campos, Visser and Masters winner van der Walt. And provisionally leaving Keegan with a slight title advantage over Jonathan and Charl.

South African Touring Cars and SupaCup now move into to the second half of their 2024 season at the fast and demanding East London Grand Prix Circuit Extreme Festival with Robert Wolk looking an increasingly attractive bet for champion and teammate Julian van der Watt now his closest rival. Sounds like a great day of racing to diarise for 27 July.