

Kyalami 9 Hour was a top-class spectacle!

 By Naresh Maharaj

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It took a while in the making, but it certainly did not disappoint the thousands who turned up on 22-23 November 2019 for the Kyalami 9 Hour, who got bang for the buck.

From a hardcore racing point of view, there were plenty thrills and spills in broad daylight and even in wet and dark conditions as the famed Highveld storm dumped loads of rain within the Kyalami precinct and beyond.

The weather did not put a damper on the race, even though the organisers thought about temporarily putting the race on hold at one stage. Music lovers were equally treated to some of South Africa's best; from Black Coffee and Shekinah to KidFonque to Prime Circle and many others. Red Hot disc brakes to loud and racy exhausts, the 9 Hour Challenge certainly didn't disappoint. Whoever said motor racing and live music didn't go hand in hand?!



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Local racing fans have waited 37 years for their endurance classic to return to South African soil, but the long absence was more than worth it. A race, mostly run in bright sunshine, ended under the cover of darkness and in a cloud of spray when the action finally resumed following a two-hour-long delay caused by heavy rain.

Dramatic conclusion

There is no other way to describe it. This year's revived Kyalami 9 Hour came to a dramatic conclusion with Porsche and Dennis Olsen emerging as champions of the 2019 Intercontinental GT Challenge, powered by Pirelli.

History will recall Frikadelli Racing's pole-winning 911 GT3 R shared by Olsen, Nick Tandy and Mathieu Jaminet enjoying a perfect day that included fastest lap (Tandy) and victory, which also secured Porsche the Manufacturers' crown, Olsen the Drivers' title, and the winning crew Kyalami's original 9 Hour.



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Walkenhorst Motorsport's Christian Krognæs, Mikkel Jensen and Nicky Catsburg recorded BMW's best result of the season with second, while long-time race leaders Richard Lietz, Kevin Estre and Michael Christensen completed the podium in their GPX Racing Porsche.

Seven drivers were in contention of winning the title, while Porsche had to overcome a 22-point deficit in order to beat Mercedes-AMG. And it received a helping hand early on when GruppeM's entry, which also featured Drivers' Championship leader Maxi Buhk, retired on lap one with an engine issue. That opened the door for Maxi Goetz and Olsen who began the day six and 10 points, respectively, behind Buhk.



Michael Von Rooyen (RSA)

But what about this for a racing fact: Frikadelli's Olsen, Tandy and Jaminet claimed a hat-trick of pole, fastest lap and victory. Just impressive. Tandy is a driver for the future in this sport. He admitted to a mistake midway through the race as he unintentionally back-tapped another Porsche, driven by Michael Christensen, that saw both drivers spin off the track. This resulted in a drive-through penalty for Tandy but despite this, he held on to take the chequered flag.

The Highveld sound and light show was a spectacle to watch as streaks of lightning could be seen on the horizon, but the drivers were undeterred, especially Tandy who raced superbly in both wet and dry conditions.

Several pitstop infringements prevented Audi Sport from challenging, but Christopher Haase, Markus Winkelhock and Christopher Mies still finished fourth after making the most of the late wet running.

All in all, a great event matched by the best local and international drivers and some of the best local musos.

Bring on the next Kyalami 9 Hour Challenge!

ABOUT NARESH MAHARAJ

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