

VW Challenge

1989 – 2017

Weather adds to the challenge at season finale

Rain, which started falling just before qualifying and continued for the rest of the day, added an additional complication to the competitor's lives at the final round of the 2017 VW Challenge at Zwartkops Raceway on Saturday, 25 November. Coming into the event, two of the class championships had already been decided, Adrian Wood (Laserfische Polo) taking class B while Rory Atkinson (PoziDrive Polo) dominated class C in 2017. The class A the fight, however, was still to be decided with Iain Pepper (Husqvarna Motorcycles / Lee Thompson Racing Polo) holding the advantage over Stiaan Kriel (Spanjaard Polo).



Kriel knew he had to win, and take the bonus points on offer for pole position and the fastest lap in each race, to have any chance of denying Pepper his first title after a seven-year absence from competitive circuit racing. He started out the right way, claiming pole in a qualifying session that got wetter as it went on. He lined up with Wayne Crous (Delway Polo) alongside him on the front row of the grid. Waldie Meintjes (Marty's Body & Spray Polo) and Andre Calitz (AC Honed Group Polo) shared the second row with Devon

Piazza Musso (Allegiance / Reef Supplies Polo) and Wayne Masters (Performance Masters Polo) in fifth and sixth. Pepper could only manage the seventh quickest time of the class A competitors.

Nic Clarke (PoziDrive Polo) was by far the quickest of the class B brigade, setting a time almost two seconds quicker than newly-crowned champion Wood. Reno van Heerden (KWC Polo) had his best qualifying session of the season to take third ahead of Roberto Joaquim (Cool-Freeze Polo). Jacques Smith (Hydra Arc Polo) and Andy Gossman (Dimension Signs Polo) rounded out the top six.

In class C Chris Dale (PoziDrive Polo) claimed pole position from Shaun Crous (Ancro Building Projects Polo), Rory Atkinson (PoziDrive Polo) and Gareth Lyke (Gaz-O-Matic Polo).



In the opening race, Kriel opened up a substantial lead while Pepper was working his way through the field. The tricky conditions did not make it easy for anyone and a number of drivers slid off the track at various stages. Kriel experienced this as well, which allowed Pepper through into the lead part-way through the penultimate lap. While Kriel was able to regain the circuit, and set his fastest lap of the race, he could not prevent Pepper from taking the race win and with it the class A championship. Quinton Needham, who damaged the front of his Megatron Polo in qualifying, worked his way through the field to claim the final podium position, his best result since moving up to class A. Piazza Musso managed to hold off Masters to take fifth while Gavin Ross brought his Norbrake Polo home in sixth.

In class B Clarke and Wood were involved in an epic dice which only ended when the slippery conditions caught Wood out on the final lap, allowing Clarke through for the win. Wood had to settle for second. The race-long battle between Gossman and Smith ended with the pair separated by just a couple of car lengths, Gossman taking the final podium position. Joaquim and van Heerden rounded out the top six.



In class C Dale was the early leader but both Atkinson and Crous worked their way past the pole-sitter as the race went on. Atkinson took another win from Crous with Dale completing the podium. Lyke ended the race in fourth.

While the rain had abated somewhat by the start of the second race, the circuit was still wet and slippery, but Pepper didn't let that worry him. Starting from pole after setting the quickest lap in the first race, the newly-crowned champion opened up a substantial gap at the head of the field before easing off in the closing stages, taking a comfortable win from Kriel with Needham again taking the final podium position. Meintjes and Crous, who were both caught out by the conditions in the opening race, kept it on the black stuff to take fourth and fifth respectively ahead of Masters in sixth.

The early stages of the class B race again saw Wood and Clarke involved in a struggle for supremacy at the front of the field. This ended when Wood went wide at the table top, allowing Clarke to take a comfortable win. Wood worked his way up to second before sliding off the track again. He had to do the hard work all over, again working his way up to second place which he held until the flag. Joaquim took his first ever class B podium with Gossman, Smith and Stuart Mack (Autobarn Polo) rounding out the top six.



Atkinson and Crous had a battle at the front of the class C field, but Atkinson was able to take his fifteenth win of the season. Lyle got the better of Dale early on and was able to hold on to take the final podium position.

In the overall standings Pepper, Kriel and Needham occupied the class A podium. Clarke took class B from Wood and Joaquim while Atkinson took yet another class C victory ahead of Crous and Lyke.

In the final standings, Wood took the overall championship from Pepper and Atkinson. Pepper was crowned class A champion with Kriel and Piazza Musso in second and third respectively. Wood was comfortably in front in class B with Lyle Ramsay (Monroe Racing RSA Polo) in second and Clarke third. Atkinson took class C from Crous and Dale.

The VW Challenge would like to acknowledge the valuable support of their sponsors, ATE Brakes, Dicktator Engine Management Systems, Glasfix Windscreen Repairs, Norbrake, and Roofsure who make the series possible.

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