

# Kyalami 9 Hour: A home win for Sheldon van der Linde

By  Naresh Maharaj

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BMW has clinched its first Intercontinental GT Challenge victory since 2020 after Sheldon van der Linde, Dries Vanthoor and Charles Weerts lead home a Team WRT one-two at the Kyalami 9 Hour this evening, 25 February. The race got underway amidst much fanfare from the thousands of locals who attended the annual event and Kyalami's master and local favourite showed all just why he loves this track.



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## Goosebumps!

Whilst he shared the wheel with Belgium drivers Vanthoor and Weerts, it was van der Linde that demonstrated his prowess with flawless driving and overtaking maneuvers: “Every time I race in my home country, it seems to go fantastically well. I have been here three times now and have finished on the podium each time – and won twice. The first victory was very special, but this was even more emotional, as I had a lot of friends and family at the track. I really had goosebumps on the podium. Thank you to BMW M Motorsport and compliments to WRT for that performance in only the third race with BMW.”

The 32 M4 GT3 took the chequered flag 1.7s clear of the sister machine shared by Philipp Eng, Augusto Farfus and Maxime Martin who chased Van der Linde to the line after a late Safety Car period slashed the latter’s advantage. Tresor Attempto’s Audi crewed by Mattia Drudi, Ricardo Feller and Patric Niederhauser completed the overall podium another 1.3s behind.

It was BMW’s first Intercontinental victory since Farfus and Van der Linde also triumphed in South Africa four seasons ago, while WRT ended a IGTC losing streak stretching back to the 2019 Suzuka 10 Hours where Vanthoor was also part of its winning Audi line-up.

Tresor Attempto’s second R8 LMS GT3 finished fourth overall in the hands of Alex Aka, Dennis Marschall and Markus Winkelhock thanks, in part, to GruppeM Racing’s gearbox issue that denied Maro Engel, Mikael Grenier and Raffaele

Marciello a podium shot.

Instead, it was SunEnergy1 by SPS's entry that scored the bulk of Mercedes-AMG's IGTC points in fifth overall. The car shared by Kenny Habul, Jules Gounon and Yannick Mettler won the event's Pro-Am class, finished third of the Intercontinental entries, and won IGTC's Independent Cup. BMW's one-two now sees it tied with Mercedes-AMG at the top of the manufacturers' standings.

## A long-awaited win

It was a long waited win for BMW and WRT who had to seize control from GruppeM soon after the start despite Farfus and Van der Linde swapping second place at Turn 1 on the opening lap. The home favourite was back ahead with the help of team orders after eight minutes before he hunted down and passed Maro Engel through the Jukskei Sweep with quarter-of-an-hour gone. It was wheel-to-wheel racing at its Kyalami best.

Farfus was also past the Mercedes-AMG before the first round of stops began just after the hour mark. But although #33 regularly closed in on #32, there was never any serious threat of a lead change between the two WRT entries which remained no more than four seconds apart until roughly half distance when Weerts began gapping Farfus after each entry had cycled through its three crew members.

Pro-Am class honours went to the No. 75 SunEnergy1 by SPS Mercedes of Jules Gounon, Yannick Mettler and Kenny Habul, which recorded a fifth-place overall finish and third-place points in the overall IGTC drivers' championship.

It was the highest-placed Mercedes in the race after gearbox trouble struck the GruppeM entry just prior to halfway.

## Gear trouble

Engel and Mikael Grenier limped the Pro class entry, which finished third Bathurst, around the track for nearly two hours without functional first, second and sixth gears before it was sent to the garage with two hours and 15 minutes to go while in sixth before retiring in the final 20 minutes.

As the evening approached it looked as though Audi might be able to challenge the BMWs but the M4s upped their pace and it wasn't long before #32 and #33 were able to pull clear again.

Stradale's Charl Arangies, Arnold Neveling and Clint Weston also scored their first IGTC points in eighth overall, one place ahead of GruppeM's hobbled but classified entry, while MJR Motorsport's Marius Jackson, Mo Mia and Kwanda Mokoena rounded out the top-10.

But the night belonged to Sheldon van der Linde who heaped praise on fellow drivers Vanthoor and Weerts. "To be honest, it feels like a title today. It is fantastic to drive with these guys. We didn't make any mistakes and the car was just perfect. At the moment, I am lost for words. We came close last year and this year we managed it. Simply unbelievable," Van der Linde said.

## ABOUT NARESH MAHARAJ

Naresh Maharaj is a petrol head who loves cars and writing about them. He is also a Member of the SA Guild of Motoring Journalists. Naresh is also an international sports correspondent and an acclaimed corporate MC and voice-over artist. Naresh is a sports/news producer for community radio stations and also an award-winning sports journalist. Contact Naresh on [nnmaharaj321@gmail.com](mailto:nnmaharaj321@gmail.com)

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