

## SA's motorsport season kicks-off this week

On Saturday, 2 March 2019, the first round of both the GTC (Global Touring Cars) series and the Falken Polo Cup will kick-off as part of the Extreme Festival presented by Dunlop and Falken Tyres. Taking place at the Dezzi Raceway, they will be flanked by SA Superbikes, the Supersport 600, as well as the Investchem 1600.



Photo supplied by Sumitomo Rubber South Africa.

The Falken Polo Cup is one of the most anticipated events on the motor racing calendar. Cars are custom-made by VW for racing with every part identical, right down to the fuel used. By racing using the exact same car as a rival, it evens the playing field and brings to the fore the individual skill of the driver. It's in this arena that new talent is spotted, and where new names rise.

"It is one of the most competitive races in the country because of this intense focus on the driver's skill. It's very exciting to watch!" comments Riaz Haffejee, chief executive officer of Sumitomo Rubber South Africa (SRSA), the holding company for Dunlop and Falken Tyres.

A number of former champions will race alongside the defending champion Jeffrey Kruger. Kruger will have his hands full to fend off a number of title hopefuls such as former champion Chris Shorter who returns to the sport after taking a sabbatical. Other equally fast and talented drivers who will be looking to make their mark, are Jurie Swart, Janu van der Westhuizen and Matt Shorter, alongside newcomer brothers Nathan and Damian Hammond, as well as Stiaan Kriel and Dario Busi.

"Most of the drivers in the field had a very successful test session at Zwartkops," said Mike Rowe, head of Volkswagen Motorsport. "The cars were working well and the times are already significantly faster than last year, thanks to the new slick Falken Tyres. More encouraging is the fact that the times between most of the drivers in the field are very close which bodes well for the season. The title fight will be a tough one and spectators are in for a treat."

This year, Volkswagen Motorsport has two drivers who will contest the season. Jonathan Mogotsi and Raais Asmal. In 2017, Mogotsi won a race in his first year, something which is almost unheard of. Then in 2018, he nearly won the title after being in the fight all year long. In the end, he was only beaten by two former champions Kruger and Pepper. "We have high hopes for him in 2019," added Rowe.

New teammate Asmal, whose talent has been further developed under the watchful eye of Graeme Nathan and his team, has grown from the Regional Superhatch series to take his next step into the Falken Polo Cup.

"Racing at Dezzi will be a first time experience for most drivers," said Tony Taylor, Extreme Festival organiser. "No one has raced GTC on this circuit, especially not with Dezzi's new track changes. The playing field between debut and established drivers will be levelled, making for a hugely competitive day of racing."

Track owner Desmond Gutzeit said, "We've essentially made the track wider and smoother for improved side-by-side racing."

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