

History in the making as Letlaka, Sipuka and Kekana line up for the Kyalami 9 hour

 By [Naresh Maharaj](#)

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Don't you just love it when you know that history is going to be made in a sport that is somewhat not easy to crack into? Well, that's exactly what's going to happen when the teams line up on the grid for the start of the Kyalami 9-Hour race on Saturday, 4 December 2022. A piece of South African motorsport history will be made with the appearance of the first all-Black African team tackling the famous race. The Intercontinental GT Championship will see Xolile Letlaka, Tschops Sipuka and Philip Kekana take on the best GT3 racers in the world behind the wheel of their Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo.



Tschops Sipuka, Philip Kekana, and Xolile Letlaka from left to right

The 2021 Kyalami 9 Hours is an endurance event that was planned to have taken place on 4 December 2021 at the Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit in Midrand (postponed due to Sars-CoV-2 Omicron variant). The event is the sixth and final round of the 2021 Intercontinental GT Challenge.

Born and bred in Qumbu in the then Transkei, Bashobonke Tschops Sipuka needs no real introduction when it comes to motorsport in SA. He is a legend.

The likeable racer made his return to the national circuit, after a seven-year absence, racing with Terry Moss Racing and the Audi South Africa team in the 2019 Global Touring Cars (GTC) Championship.

Tschops started his racing career with Terry Moss Racing in 1999 and has competed in a diverse range of categories locally and globally, including Formula Volkswagen in Germany, a 25-hour endurance race at Spa Franchorchamps, saloon car racing in Malaysia and Super Truck racing in South Africa.

But it was his record wins with Terry Moss Racing that stands out most, having won the Volkswagen Polo Cup titles back-to-back in 2002 and 2003.



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“It will be an honour to showcase ourselves on an international stage,” said Sipuka. “Consistency and speed will be our watchwords. The Kyalami 9-Hour is going to be a very special moment for our team.”

Letlaka and Sipuka raced their Huracan GT3 to two victories and a second-place finish from their four starts in the 2021 SA Endurance Series, providing a taste of things to come in the Kyalami 9-Hour where they will be aiming to win the National Class.

Letlaka has now achieved his life’s goals, both in business and motorsport, and now he wants to start giving back to those less fortunate.

“I hope that even 10 or 15 kids watching the 9-Hour will ignite a dream that one day they could be on the grid of a race, or even be part of the technical crew fielding one of these magnificent machines,” said Letlaka, who became the first man of colour to win a round of the Endurance series, his first race in a GT3 car.

“It will probably be one of the proudest days of my life”, said Letlaka about how he will feel when standing on the grid with his teammates while the National Anthem is played.

“Fielding a team with two drivers who grew up in rural villages in the Eastern Cape and one from Soweto speaks to my motto of 'we lift as we rise'.”



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Kekana is both excited and nervous about his GT3 racing debut; having been out of the sport for a long time, he is relishing his test session ahead of the big race.

“It’s going to be a steep learning curve for me; I have to become accustomed to the car – understand how the machine works and how far I can push it. I was very excited when Xolile called to offer me the drive. I’ve been training hard since then”, said the 55-year-old Sowetan resident.

Kekana started racing Group N cars in 1997 before winning the title in 2002 and hopes the Into Africa Mining team will inspire young black children to take a bigger interest in motorsport, especially from an engineering perspective.

Other SA drivers include one of the race favourites Kelvin Van Der Linde, Silvio Scribante, Marius Jackson, Charl Arangies, Mikael Pitamber, Arnold Neveling, Michael Van Rooyen and Mo Mia.

Some of the specially modified cars that will vie for top positions include the Audi R8 (6), Ferrari 488 (2), Mercedes AMG

(2), and three Lamborghini Huracans.

The endurance race this weekend is the sixth and final round of the intercontinental GT Championship. Spectator numbers are limited so if this is your cup of tea, get your tickets early. There are plenty of hospitality areas and food trucks will be on-site to ensure you don't go hungry. The nine-hour endurance race gets the green light at 1pm.

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 nmaharaj321@gmail.com

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