

*World Airnews Special Race of Champions supplement*

# CESSNA, DWC TAKE THE "TIN" AT RACE OF CHAMPIONS

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**P**ENETRATING THE “boerwors curtain” to come and take their tin... was how one Durban Wings Club pilot described the team’s meteoric success at the recent Race of Champions and, reminiscent of last year, first across the finish line was a Cessna 172, flown by a blonde woman pilot, in the colours of the DWC.

Already known as the standard setter when it comes to its large scale hospitality, and professional running of aviation events, Tzaneen’s Letaba Flying Club pulled out all the stops in ensuring that contestants and media alike were made to feel like family with their special style of small-town, big-heart hospitality.

All part of the family maybe, but once the start light turned green, contestants switched to full business mode, resulting in fierce jostling for position as the race neared its end.

Dawn of Day 1 brought with it clear, haze-free blue skies, with very light winds that boded well for air racing. Following an in-depth safety briefing by Graeme Conlyn, teams were seen moving off to secluded areas to finish some last minute briefing and strategy, while others pulled out the polish to ensure their aircraft were as aerodynamically clean as possible.

First off the line of Day 1 were the speedsters, lead by Jack Onderstal’s Glasair III from the Bloemfontein Flying Club, followed closely by a host of twins including Barons, Chieftains and Senecas, one of which, the



*Top: The winners, Ron Stirk and Arddyn Moolman; Above: Placed second were: Tertius Myburgh (left) and Adrian Barry, and below, in third place were Willie O’Driscoll (right), together with navigator, Stuart Low.*





*The victorious Durban Wings Club team who have issued a challenge to other clubs to try and beat them next year. Below: Some of the 90 aircraft ready to start the race.*

Cessna 402B, crewed by Tertius Myburgh and Adrian Barry would make up just over seven minutes on the day to hold the “clubhouse lead” after Day 1, having achieved a respectable average speed of 190,32 knots.

The next three positions were all taken by Cessna 172s, with the Durban Wings Club team of Arddyn Moolman and Ron Stirk leading the pack after having made up six and a half minutes against their handicap of 104,60 knots. Also representing Durban Wings Club, were Willie O’Driscoll and Stu Low, who raced their way into third position gaining six minutes with a speed of 122,30 knots in their Cessna 172R.

Fourth place was taken by Leon Koekemoer and Andre Koen, also in a Cessna 172R from Durban, who beat their handicap speed by 2,17 knots to achieve a gain of just over three minutes on the 335 nm course, that took competitors to Marble Hall, Vivo, and Tshipise before routing back to Tzaneen.

The Vivo area became a hive of activity during Day 1, when an engine failure forced the father-and-son team of Johnny Mayer Jr and Snr to perform a forced landing from a very low altitude. Unfortunately due to the nature of the terrain where the incident occurred, the aircraft was considerably damaged, but quick thinking and good airmanship ensured that neither crew member was injured.

What was impressive was the slick manner in which SASAR (South African Search and Rescue), who were present at the event, set the wheels in motion should the need have arisen for a search and rescue operation.

Fifth position on Day 1 went to what must have been the unluckiest team at the event. Race Number 66, a Piper Seneca belonging to Robert Myburgh, was “attacked” by what must have been a very jealous Ravin 500 that night. Having made up nearly three minutes on Day 1, the Seneca was well placed to make



a charge at the podium on Day 2.

However, dawn on Day 2 brought with it very sad news. The Ravin 500 of Riaan de Wet, that had been parked across the taxiway from the Seneca, was left unchoked overnight and once the brakes started to cool, the aircraft made its way down the sloped taxiway, causing a large amount of damage when it met up with the Seneca on the other side.

No traces of blood were spotted around the interlocked airframes, so one has to assume that the owners sorted it out in an amicable fashion, yet one cannot help but wonder if the final standings might not have been slightly different had the fifth-placed Seneca been able to take part in Day 2.

#### **RACE TO THE FINISH**

Day 2 once more brought with it conditions favourable for racing, and once the safety briefing had been completed, it was a sea of slightly more serious faces than the previous day that moved out toward their aircraft. Mistakes of Day 1 were moved to the back of the memory banks, so that pilots and navigators alike could put all their focus into the day at hand.

First off the mark was the Cessna 172A of Moolman and Stirk, followed by the two Durban based 172Rs of O’Driscoll and Koekemoer, with the faster aircraft getting airborne toward the end of the sequence to ensure, as far as possible, those multiple photo finishes for which air races are renowned

For the spectators and non-flying team and family members, a few big-screens were situated in the beer tent, to help them keep track of their respective heroes, as they did battle in the Limpopo skies, everyone listening out for the first aircraft to call five minutes out.

The call, “Tzaneen Tower, Charlie November Zulu, five minutes out”, broke the suspense, as everyone made their way outside to witness the mass arrival of 87 aircraft, which, for a short moment in time, elevated Tzaneen Airport to “busiest airspace in the world status” with regards separation and aircraft in the circuit.

A bright landing light in the distance was the first sign of the veteran C172A, flown by Arddyn Moolman and navigated by Ron Stirk, as it came in low over the dry bushveld to



places and in doing so, eke out Day 1's fourth-placed finishers, Leon Koekemoer and Andre Koen, by relegating them to fifth slot by the last checkpoint; both teams flying 172s from Durban's Virginia Airport.

Interestingly all five of the first aircraft to cross the line, were Cessnas, four of which were 172s, three of which are based at Virginia. In terms of flying clubs represented at the race, the local Letaba Flying Club fielded eleven aircraft, with the Durban Wings Club represented by seven teams, who palmed in overall first, third and fourth places.

Once the dust had settled, and the sun had set, it was time for the black tie awards banquet held at Tzaneen's showgrounds. Winning the *World Airnews* Rose Bowl for the first female pilot home was Arddyn Moolman, who, together with Ron Stirk took the top honours overall.

Next year, the Race of Champions moves to the Ermelo club, who have their work cut out for them in order to match the levels that have been set by Tzaneen. However, with interest in the race growing and the type of support given to the event by Naturelink, it can only go from strength to strength. →

cross the finish line. Following closely was the turbocharged Cessna 402B that was making a last ditch effort to pip the 172 to the post, but the team of Tertius Myburgh and Adrian Barry had to settle for second place.

Holding on to their third place position throughout the day, the next aircraft to cross the line was another C172, owned and flown by Willie O'Driscoll, together with navigator, Stuart Low. On a day that seemed tailor made for 172s, the largest push came from yet another Durban Wings Club team, of Dave Bruce and Barry Kinnear, who, having been placed 13<sup>th</sup> on Day 1, really ate up the competition to gain nine

