

Powder Puff Pilot Performs Perfectly...

MARY WINS THE RACE OF CHAMPIONS

FORMER SOUTH African national rally champions, Mary de Klerk and Barry de Groot, showed the rest of the 49 entrants in the inaugural Race of Champions held at Tzaneen last month, what winning is all about when they flew their Cessna 172D to a hands down victory.

Pin-point navigation by De Groot and superb flying by De Klerk laid the foundations in the first round for their ultimate victory. Flying under the colours of the Durban Wings Club and with a handicap speed of 120 knots, their performance in the first round enabled them to cover the 300+ nautical mile course at an average speed of 127,38 knots, thus clipping nine minutes and six seconds off their handicap time.

Their rallying experience – they won the South African National Championships in 2005 – stood them in good stead again in the second and last round when they further improved their handicap time to score a creditable victory more than three minutes ahead of the second-placed Dries Briers and Marius Schutte, of the Louis Trichardt Flying Club, in their Beech Bonanza F33A. This pair had also finished just behind the winners in the first round, having clipped just over seven minutes off their handicap time.

Placed third and in the same place after Round One, were Kiewiet and Gail Vlok, of the Klerksdorp Pilots Association.

The first twin-engined aircraft home and placed fourth overall, was a Cessna Turbo 303 flown by Letaba Flying Club home team members Gerhard van der Gry and Koos Malan. In fifth place was the immaculate North American Harvard flown by John Sayers and Jack Coetzer of the Kitty Hawk Flying Club in Gauteng.

NEW BENCHMARK

Few things in life are certain these days. However, when you hear the names Letaba Flying Club, Naturelink and Capital Sounds mentioned in relation to an aviation event, you can be certain of what to expect – superb hospitality, slick organisation, and non-stop entertainment.

With Novas Marine as this year's main sponsor, this, the first Race of Champions, raised the bar for air racing in South Africa to a whole new level.

From the moment pilots arrived and checked in, right up to the last dance of the swanky banquet, the emphasis was on fun, but it was clear that a very competitive energy

Report and photographs by:
KEVIN BARKER



Above: Mary de Klerk and Barry de Groot give the "thumbs up" after winning the Race of Champions. **Below:** Competitors line-up for the start of Day One which was to set the scene for the final positioning for the Day Two start.



simmered below the surface.

Day One dawned slightly overcast, which luckily cleared as the warm bushveld sun climbed higher. First off the mark were the race speedsters, comprising the Glasair, Lancair and Beech Baron contingent, followed by the other twin engined aircraft.

As the slowest aircraft departed on the route that stretched from Tzaneen to Musina, Alldays, Potgietersrus and back to Tzaneen, the wait began. Unfortunately, the big-screen provided in the entertainment area for tracking the race, failed to work on this day, so reports of the aircraft positions were obtained from the ATNS-manned control tower, via Brian Emmenis.

Contrary to what was expected, the first day's leaders came from the traditionally slower aircraft, being led by a Cessna 172, flown by eventual winners Mary de Klerk and Barry de Groot.

Day Two again dawned under low overcast, resulting in an hour's delay for start, but by the time 11 o'clock arrived, the heat of the sun was matched by the anticipation of the pilots as they chomped at the bit. The departure sequence this time was determined by the order of arrival on Day One, to ensure that the event came down to the finish to determine the winner.

Routing through some of South Africa's most scenic countryside via Dendron, Lydenburg and Selati, featuring mountains, valleys and waterfalls, the competitors lauded the route planners for the imaginative course that tested navigation and flying skills.

Day Two saw the big screen functioning properly which supplied great entertainment for those watching as it constantly showed the positions of the aircraft on a moving map type display, including the aircraft speed.

Right off the bat, the highly experienced rally flying team of De Klerk and De Groot took the lead, but as the afternoon drew on it was clear that a determined pack was rapidly eating up the gap.

At the end, however, it all came down to the finish line, and when the first of the swarm of 47 aircraft appeared over the hill, it was the little Cessna 172D, race number 32, which finally took the honours. It was followed by Bonanza F33A flown by Dries Briers and Marius Schutte.

■ **Please note:** Because of deadline and space constraints, we are unable to publish all the prize-winners in this issue, but a further photo-feature and more information on the event will be found in the October edition. →