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VW Polo Cup

Devin Robertson impresses for Champion Young Drivers at Aldo Scribante

A race win, two fastest laps and first overall for the day. That was the very satisfying start to the new Engen Volkswagen Cup season for 2008 rookie of the year Devin Robertson in his Champion spark plugs VW Polo.

The 16-year-old, who is the youngest driver in the VW Cup, started the first race from sixth on the grid (he qualified third but drew six in the top six 'lucky draw') and was already up to second at the end of lap one behind eventual winner Kieren Quarmby. The typical VW Cup dogfights saw the order behind Quarmby change on each lap until Robertson made second spot his own on lap six and chased Quarmby to the chequered flag. Just tenths of a second separated the two throughout the rest of the race with the final gap being 0,25s.

"I tried very line I could to get past Kieren. The car was great, but I just couldn't get enough of an advantage to make a pass stick," said Robertson.

He started from pole position in race two and was never headed throughout a dominant 10-lap performance that marks him as a potential champion in only his second season. A second successive fastest lap – 1m 14,39s – and a winning margin of 3,7s at the finish over second-placed Kosie Weyers completed an almost perfect day.

"I have to thank the team for preparing such a good car for me," said Robertson, whose own preparation was exemplary – he spent four weekends before the race meeting practicing at Midvaal Raceway. "I was helped to some extent by the battle for second place behind me," said Robertson. First Bryan Morgan and then reigning champion Jared Mortimer fought with Weyers for the right to challenge Robertson, but this allowed the Champion Young Driver to get away and first Mortimer and then Morgan fell out, leaving Robertson nearly four seconds in the lead at half distance.



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In sharp contrast, Champion Young Driver team-mate Gennaro Bonafede, after a strong showing in Friday's practice, suffered a mysterious engine management problem in qualifying and was unable to record a time. Despite the team's best efforts and the assistance of a number of experts, he was unable to take the grid for race on and only just managed to make the grid for the second of the two 10-lap races.

The 17-year-old first-year engineering student, who looked a likely champion in last year's VW Cup until faltering in the closing stages, started at the back of the 21-car grid. He was already up to 15th at the end of lap one and 11th at half distance.

With his Champion spark plugs Polo not on the pace – his best lap was 1m 15.72s compared to team-mate Robertson's 1m 14.39s – he used all his considerable driving skills to pull himself up to a creditable 10th at the finish.

"It was really confusing and frustrating not to be able to take part in qualifying or race one," said Bonafede, VW Cup rookie of the year in 2007. "The car was so good on Friday. It still wasn't perfect in race two, but at least I had some seat time and we earned three valuable championship points. A big 'thank-you' to the team for trying so hard to get the car fixed. It really was a mystery!"

"This has been a bitter-sweet weekend for the team," said Ronnie Erasmus, motor sport manager of Federal Mogul. "We're very proud of Devin's overall performance, which makes him a driver to watch this season, and, of course, we're disappointed for Gennaro. It was a difficult weekend for him and we'll be doing everything we can to sort out the mysterious engine problem on his car before the next round at Kyalami on March 28."



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