

The little fire that sparks Michael van Rooyen's motorsport magic

Issued by [Sumitomo Dunlop](#)

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Born and raised in the platinum mining capital of the world, Rustenburg, seasoned Toyota Gazoo Racing South Africa motorsport driver Michael van Rooyen only took to the wheels after high school, entering the sport with no training. But, it could just be something in the Rustenburg waters, because Michael's passion for motorsport has bagged him precious gold awards and more.



“My stepfather started karting when I finished matric, and a few years later he offered me a chance to get into the sport. I was 20 when I started my journey with a very limited budget, but I’m proud to say that none of that mattered, and I haven’t stopped since. I did not have any training and it was very tough in the beginning when I had to immediately compete with the likes of the Cronje’s, Poulter, Christiano Morgado, Briggs, Marc and Jennifer Murray, to name just a few. You can imagine the pressure I was under as they were extremely experienced having started their own careers at a very young age, and there I was trying to make my mark,” said Michael.

Now 42, with an award-winning career in the sport behind him, Michael is one of the most well-known faces on the track.

He is part of the Toyota Gazoo Racing SA team, and races in the Global Touring Cars (GTC) series at South Africa's premier motorsport event, the National Extreme Festival, where drivers race on Dunlop tyres. The Dunlop Racing Service team also keeps the wheels turning and all on track, operating from a fully equipped mobile workshop.

Motorsport highlights

Michael has won two national championships, came fifth at the World Karting Championships, and counts competing in the Nine Hours of Kyalami in February against some of the best saloon car drivers in the world, as part of his motorsport career highlights.

His favourite categories include karting 125GP, Rotax RM1, Polo cup, Production cars, and GTC.

He owes his credit to not just his stepdad for introducing the sport to him, but Calvyn Hamman.

“For some strange reason Calvyn Hamman, Vice President of Toyota at the time, thought I had potential and set me up with my current boss, Glenn Crompton, leader of the hugely successful Toyota Gazoo Racing South Africa team. Before that, for about 17 years I had dreamt of being a “factory” driver for an automotive brand, and the truth is, it’s been 10 times better than what I dreamt of,” he said.



As most drivers experience, along with key highlights, come challenging moments; and Michael said he faced his most recent ups and downs in his last Extreme Festival event of 2022.

“After a very disappointing season, my team had really pulled out all the stops to give me a great car, and I managed to get pole position and win the first race very comfortably. The second race however I had a bad start (from the back because of the reverse grid), there was an incident in turn 1 and I had to take some quick action and unfortunately, I lost ground to the cars in front of me. I managed to pass two cars a lap later but was run off the track by one of them in the very next lap, and I had to settle for seventh place. It was a disappointing end but some great positives to take from the weekend.”

And a win for him, is a win for the team. Michael said teamwork was what enabled him to do his best.

“Without our technicians and the team behind the scenes, I am absolutely nothing. We have so many role players. We have our team manager, Freddie Pretorius, who is ultimately responsible for everything besides driving. You’d often see the photos of the drivers with the weird hand signals and facial expressions, and this is the part where we try to explain what the car does on the track, and from that expressive but limited info, the team manager needs to decide what to do to improve it. Then we have a software technician, who checks and controls all the engine parameters, from boost, fuelling, throttle maps, etc. Each car also has their own mechanic, who does all the mechanical checks and changes. This is definitely a team sport where we are all family.”

But whether he’s had a great experience on the track or not, Michael said it’s his family that he looks for first.

“They are always waiting for me outside parc ferme [closed fence], and I love seeing their smiles when it goes well, and they know just what to say when it didn’t go well and cheer me up. My family is everything. And when it comes to my family’s safety, tyre safety is so important. I make sure I always look for safety features first when choosing a tyre,” he said.

Michael added that he was very proud to have been in motorsport for so long, but with the hard work the team puts in, the support of sponsors, the sacrifices he makes, the support of his family, and the “little fire inside” he owes it to everyone to do his best on the track.

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