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MTB World Championships - CM

Livigno, Italy, August 31-September 4, 2005

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Race 1 - August 31: Team Relay

Spain with first gold

By Rob Jones in Livigno

The 2005 Mountain Bike World Championships opened today in the Italian mountain village of Livigno, nestled in the Alps, up against the Swiss border near St Moritz. Spain, anchored by Jose Hermida, pulled out a last lap victory ahead of crowd favourite Italy, after France's Cedric Ravanel flatted in the final kilometres while leading. France managed to hold on for third.

The Team Relay is as much about tactics as it is riding hard. Each team sends out four riders for a lap - an Elite man, Espoir man, Junior man and Elite woman. Besides having to have strong riders, the teams need to decide on a strategy: start fast with your elite man and hope to hold on until the end, or save the strongest until last, and hope your rider can catch the leaders.

The altitude (1800 metres at the base and over 2000 at the highest point) put additional pressure on the riders, as did the long main climb and the final flat drive into a headwind. The cross-country course is set up in a figure eight, and the Team Relay did the longer 8 kilometre loop of the two legs; one lap for each of the four riders.

Canada, the defending champions and perennial favourites, looked strong again, with Geoff Kabush (fresh off winning the Norba cross-country and short track titles) scheduled to lead out, and Alison Sydor riding clean up. Unfortunately, Kabush's bike did not arrive with him in Zurich yesterday, so Ricky Federau got a last minute call to take his place. Federau suffered stomach cramps in his lap, finishing 12th. The Canadian team recovered a few spots to end up 9th.

World Cup winner Marco Bui put the Italians in the lead after the first lap, but his usual fast start was marred by pedal problems, so he handed off to Espoir rider Tony Longo with a slim 15 second lead over Switzerland. The Swiss took the lead on the second leg and appeared to be in a winning position at the end of the third lap, as other favourites such as Spain and France faded. Italy continued to ride strongly with their second and third riders, and the United States and New Zealand both moved up, with the U.S. moving into second for the final rider, and New Zealand to third. France was back in sixth place, and Spain mired in 11th, 3:36 behind Switzerland.

However, the Swiss rider began to falter, and France had put Ravanel, their strongest rider in the anchor spot. Ravanel picked off the Italian (Johannes Schweiggl) and Pole (Adrian Dzialakiewicz) on the main climb, and then went by Swiss Junior Martin Fanger at the feed station. Very quickly his lead had grown to 45 seconds, and it looked to be a clear win for the French.

"Before the last climb there is a creek bed, that you go through really fast, and that is where I got the flat." explained Ravanel. "I had to do the last four kilometres on the flat - it was really horrible for my heart, I was over 200 (beats per minute). Then, in the final kilometre Hermida passed me with the Italian and the Swiss. I was able to re-pass the Swiss for the finish, but it was very disappointing for what would normally be an easy win in that position."

The Spanish victory was unexpected for everyone, including Hermida. "When I started my lap I didn't think about the win, I just wanted to close the gap as much as possible. I started the first climb a little quiet to get my rhythm.

For me, the race was divided into the first half and the second half. For the first I was in the field, and it was a psychological challenge to get through them. It wasn't until the top (of the main climb) that I realized that I had energy to challenge in the second half. My thought was just to catch as many as possible - I didn't know my position, and it was only when the team told me that I was close to the front that I went hard." (Hermida recorded the fastest lap of the day)

The World Championships continue tomorrow with the first of the cross-country races, for Junior women and men.

Race Notes

*Germany's Sabine Spitz was back on her mountain bike for her first race in five weeks, after injuring her right knee at the European championships. Spitz went over the handlebars, hyperextending her knee, and has been restricted to road riding until last week. She rode well today to anchor the German team, with the seventh fastest time.



A gold medal
Photo ©: Rob Jones



Team USA
Photo ©: Rob Jones



Canada's Alison Sydor
Photo ©: Rob Jones

*Hermida was asked if he had thought at all about last year's world championships, when he was not allowed to race after recording a high hematocrit. "This year I am relaxed, I have forgotten about what happened last year. I have the proper papers now for my hematocrit, so this is just a normal Worlds for me. Of course, if I can show that I am racing well and I am strong, that is good, but now I am tranquilo."

*Riders are divided in their opinions about the unusually long (12.1 kilometre) course. The course is considered to be very hard, with a lot of climbing, and the descents are extremely steep, leaving little time to rest. However, there is very little technical riding. If it rains, the grass sections will become very slippery on the climbs.



Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos
Photo ©: Rob Jones

Photography

For a thumbnail gallery of these images, [click here](#)

Images by Rob Jones/www.canadiancyclist.com

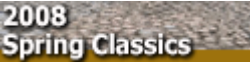
- [Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos](#) wins for Spain
- [Kashi Leuchs \(New Zealand\)](#) challenged for bronze on lap 3
- [Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos](#)
- [Sweden and France](#) duke it out for 3rd
- [Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos](#)
- [Team Italy](#) went from 1st to 4th and back to 2nd
- [Team USA](#) was 2nd at the end of lap 3, but dropped to 7th at the finish
- [Team France](#) had a great final lap moving from 6th to 3rd
- [Team Sweeden](#) move up from 10th to 4th
- [Team Switzerland's Petra Henzi](#) and Team Italy's Eva Lechner
- [Team Switzerland's Junior Martin Fanger](#)
- [France's Johannes Schweiggl](#) and [Poland's Adrian Dzialakiewicz](#)
- [Canada's Alison Sydor](#)
- [Enthusiastic fans](#)
- [A very crowded podium](#)
- [A gold medal](#) for Spain

Results

1	Spain	1.26.02
	Ruben Ruzafa Cueto	
	Oliver Aviles Gilabert	
	Rocio Gamonal Ferrera	
	Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos	
2	Italy	0.19
	Marco Bui	
	Tony Longo	
	Eva Lechner	
	Johannes Schweiggl	
3	France	0.30
	Alexis Vuillermoz	
	Stéphane Tempier	
	Séverine Hansen	
	Cédric Ravanel	
4	Sweden	0.41
	Emil Lindgren	
	Mattias Wengelin	
	Maria Ostergren	
	Fredrik Kessiakoff	
5	Switzerland	1.22
	Florian Vogel	
	Nino Schurter	
	Petra Henzi	
	Martin Fanger	
6	Poland	2.00
	Marek Galilski	
	Dariusz Batek	
	Maja Wloszczowska	
	Adrian Dzialakiewicz	
7	USA	2.11
	Adam Craig	
	Samuel Schultz	
	Kyle Hammaker	
	Mary Mc Conneloug	
8	Germany	
	Stefan Sahm	
	Heiko Gutmann	
	Benjamin Rudiger	
	Sabine Spitz	
9	Canada	2.54
	Ricky Federau	
	Martin Lazarski	
	Neal Kindree	
	Alison Sydor	
10	New Zealand	3.22

	Kashi Leuchs	
	Marcus Roy	
	Clinton Robert Avery	
	Rosara Joseph	
11	Slovenia	6.58
	Miha Solar	
	Mohor Vrhovnik	
	Nina Homovec	
	Luka Kodra	
12	Estonia	7.11
	Caspar Austa	
	Taavi Selder	
	Tanel Kangert	
	Maaris Meier	
13	Russian Federation	7.16
	Yury Trofimov	
	Denis Vorontsov	
	Dmitry Medvedev	
	Evgenia Belozeroва	
14	Argentina	13.19
	Carlos Franco Gennero	
	Carlos Rodrigo Sigre	
	Margarita Noelia Rodriguez	
	Sebastian Luciano Blanco	
15	Hungary	16.49
	Andras Parti	
	Adam Gulyas	
	Emese Simon	
	Mate Palfy	

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