

MTB world championships – CM Rotorua, New Zealand, August 22-27, 2006

Score one for the Swiss in World Championship opener

By Rob Jones

Switzerland, the favourites going into the Team Relay, did not disappoint, with a dominant performance in the opening event of the 2006 Mountain Bike World Championships in Rotorua, New Zealand. Italy and Poland put in strong last laps to ride back into contention and take the silver and bronze medals respectively.

The weather proved to be a factor throughout the race, with everything from bright sunshine to rain and even hail blasting the riders. As one local put it: "Four seasons in one day, New Zealand!"

All the riders agreed that the mud played a huge factor, with many crashing on the downhill. "Compared to Europe, it is quite different" commented Florian Vogel (Switzerland). "It was like riding on soap out there."

Vogel took off fast for Switzerland, followed closely by Jeremy Horgan-Kobelski (USA), Tony Longo (Italy) and Marcin Karczynski (Poland). Canada's Geoff Kabush struggled in the rain and slippery mud, and Horgan-Kobelski dropped well back after a pedal unscrewed on him.

"It came off and I didn't have an 8 millimeter wrench with me" JHK lamented after his lap. "I put it on with my fingers, but it came off again before I could get to the Tech Zone."

At the front, Switzerland was cruising ahead of a battle that was developing for silver and bronze. Italy, Poland and Sweden came in almost on top of each other after the first lap, 50-plus seconds down on Switzerland. Russia and Canada were nearly two minutes back.

After the second lap, Switzerland held onto a 1:07 lead over Italy, while Max Plaxton had a superb ride to move Canada back up to third, only nine seconds behind Italy. France was up to fourth, four seconds back of Canada.



Switzerland scores first at MTB Worlds
Photo ©: Rob Jones



The podium
Photo ©: Mikkeli Godfree

Petra Henzi took over for Switzerland, while Canada sent out Junior Alex Harvey - son of Canadian cycling and nordic skiing legend Pierre Harvey. Harvey quickly moved into second, but faded in the latter portion of his lap, with Spain (David Lozano) and Poland (Maja Wloszczowska) putting in very strong laps. Spain actually took an 18 second lead into the final lap over Switzerland, but had Marga Fullana as the anchor rider, and the gap was no match for Switzerland's Nino Schurter, who caught Fullana at the base of the climb and roared away for the victory.

Italy also had a strong final lap, going from sixth to second, with Jader Zoli putting in the fastest lap of the race. Poland jumped up from fifth to the medal podium spot, but were nearly caught when France's Cedric Ravanel recorded the second fastest lap of the race to pull to within 16 seconds of the Polish finisher Krystin Pyrgies.

The teams that chose to save their strongest riders until last - as opposed to sending the elite men off first and anchoring with the women - picked the right tactic on this course, with Fullana and Sydor both caught quickly by the faster men.

"We did not use the same tactics as Spain" agreed Schurter, "I was on course with Fullana, and I was not worried, I knew that I could catch her."

Sydor confirmed the analysis: "You need a way bigger lead, if it is less than three minutes, then you are going to get caught. I was caught by at least four guys."

Images by Rob Jones/www.canadiancyclist.com - Images by Mikkeli Godfree/Cyclingnews.com

Results

1	Switzerland	1.27.20
	Florian Vogel/Martin Fanger/Petra Henzi/Nino Schurter	
2	Italy	0.50
	Tony Longo/Cristian Cominelli/Eva Lechner/Jader Zoli	
3	Poland	1.04
	Marcin Karczynski/Adrian Dzialakiewicz/Maja Wloszczowska/Kryspin Pyrgies	
4	France	1.20
	Alexis Vuillermoz/StEphane Tempier/SEverine Hansen/CEdric Ravanel	
5	Germany	2.07
	Benjamin Rudiger/Sebastian Lehr/Sabine Spitz/Moritz Milatz	
6	Sweden	2.13
	Emil Lindgren/Mattias Wengelin/Maria Ostergren/Fredrik Kessiakoff	
7	Spain	3.00
	Carlos Coloma/Ruben Ruzafa/David Lozano/Margarita Fullana	
8	Russian Federation	3.02
	Yury Trofimov/Evguen Petchenine/Irina Kalentieva/Sergey Nikolaev	
9	Canada	5.14
	Geoff Kabush/Max Plaxton/Alex Harvey/Alison Sydor	
10	New Zealand	6.05
	Kashi Leuchs/Clinton Robert Avery/Rosara Joseph/Carl Jones	
11	The Netherlands	7.20
	Jelmer Pietersma/Niels Wubben/Laura Turpijn/Rudi Van Houts	
12	United States Of America	7.56
	Jeremy Horgan-Kobelski/Samuel Schultz/Tristen Uhl/Mary McConneloug	
13	Brasil	13.58
	Daniel Rezende/Erika Gramiselli/Henrique Avancini/Edivando Cruz	
14	South Africa	15.45
	Ryk Coetzee/Burrry Stander/Yolanda Speedy/Justice Makhale	