

Taillefer Rides Again

There was a rosy glow about many in the partisan French crowd at Les Gets after their main mountain bike hero took his first World Cup win - the one they had come to believe he would never achieve.

Although **Taillefer** is not the most successful French downhill racer, his good looks, dashing style and quixotic personality have earned him a special place in the hearts of the French mountain-biking public.



After rounds one and two in the 1998 World Cup series were affected by Saturday night rains, teams and spectators arrived in France with hopes of a sunny downhill event and the type of racing that everybody loves. What they got was a near repeat of last week's

mud-fest, with scrambled tyre changes, zipped up rain gear and a long afternoon in the grey drizzle.

Elite Female

After clear and partly sunny qualifying runs on Sunday morning, **Chausson** again easily beat 57 starters and gapped the number-two qualifier **Katja Repo** (FIN, Sintesi Verlicchi) by 16.5 seconds. The powerful women of Sintesi Verlicchi also posted the next two fastest qualifying times, with GT's **LeCaer** and **Gonzalez** following. **Missy Giove** (USA, Volvo-Cannondale) and last week's winner Sari Jorgenson (SUI, Yeti) had slow qualifying times and so started their final runs near the top of the order.

Jorgenson led early but it was soon clear that she had not repeated her stellar performance in Italy. Soon after the Swiss woman, Giove bettered her time with a 6:50.25. Like many riders to come, Giove had not stayed upright for the full course. *"I was going good, but crashed in the trees. I slid like 30 yards in the mud, then had to go back and get my bike,"* she recalled.

Giove's position at the top of the leader board held firm until there were only four women left to race down the hill. **Sabrina Jonnier** (FRA, Sintesi Verlicchi) crossed the finish to the cheers of the crowd, and with a time identical to Giove's. Swatch timing examined the result to one thousandth of a second, and spotted a difference of one. Giove had

A hail storm did not deter the ninth starter, **Johan Engstrom** (SWE, Scott Int'l.), whose early lead held for most of the day. Only **Christian Taillefer** (FRA, Peugeot Palaiseau) was able to beat the Swede's time. Taillefer, who recently broke the kilometre lance mountain bike speed record, did not achieve anywhere near terminal velocity in the mud at Les Gets, but running on his spiky Hutchinson prototype tyres, the daring rider from southern France was 2.98 seconds fast than Engstrom.

Even so, with 16 of the 75 finalists still to come, past experience suggested that Taillefer's time would be beaten. The course and weather conditions were not changing much, and nobody could remember a time when the 16th-from-last rider had won. Normally the winner is one of the top five qualifiers. Tyres obviously helped, because Taillefer's Peugeot Palaiseau team-mate, **Mickael Deldycke** (FRA), soon posted a time only 0.38 of a second slower than Engstrom, which eventually was good enough for third place.

Sunn-Un still had their four racers left, and pundits predicted the Peugeot rider's time would fall to at least one or two of these fast men. But as this bedraggled elite arrived one by one at the finish area, it became clear that Taillefer's time would stand. Vouilloz, who had fallen in the mud and slid hard enough to lose a glove, was visibly upset by his experience, while Gracia rode in with a flat front tyre. When only two riders remained, Taillefer exclaimed: *"If I had got top five today I would have been happy, but this... my heart!"* And he was the first to let out a yell when neither of the remaining riders beat his time. His voice was soon drowned out by the crowd cheering loudly for their hero who had finally come home.

This result had been a long time in the making. Back in 1992, when the downhill series was called the Grundig Super Cup, he came agonisingly close, but was beaten by his brother Fabrice. Then in 1994 at Hindelang, Germany, Taillefer finished second on a course in similar conditions to today. But in recent years his prospects have been looking less and less good. *"I'm so happy, it's been a long time,"* a beaming Taillefer said. *"I've had a couple bad seasons, and now I have a great bike and great tyres. My bike works so well - we've worked a lot on it. Also I had a great spike tire today by Hutchinson."* Concluding that: *"I knew if I could go fast today I could do well, but I was tired at the*

6:50.251, and was beaten by Jonnier's time of 6:50.250. This put Jonnier on top. Neither **Helen Mortimer** (GBR, Sintesi Verlicchi) nor **Katja Repo** (FIN, Sintesi Verlicchi) bettered their team-mate's time, and so all eyes were on the last rider down - Chausson - as she approached the finish. Like Giove, Chausson had also crashed on the course, but the difference was a little more than 16 seconds - in Chausson's favour.

"The regular course (in dry conditions) was no problem, and I think if I didn't have problems with my pedal and crashing I could have gone five seconds faster," she said. *"It's nice to win in France, and now I can put Nevegal out of my mind. It's also good to know I can ride well in the mud,"* commented Chausson. The day before, she had denied that any of her rivals were coming closer to her amazingly high standards. *"They stay the same, but I am getting better all the time,"* is what she said. On today's performance it was hard to argue against that.

Jonnier, who had finished with a flat rear tire, said this result was a huge confidence boost. *"I wasn't sure if I was good enough. Now I always want a top-10 and hope for good results at the world's."*

Yet Giove ended the day with something to smile about. Her third place finish was good enough to earn her the orange jersey of the Grundig/UCI series leader.

Elite Male

France's mighty *Sunn-Un* team dominated the morning's qualifying session contested by 254 riders. These riders filled the first four positions - reportedly an unprecedented feat. Pundits in the finish area talked of the possibility of Sunn-Un riders taking the top three places in the final.

Yet immediately after Chausson's winning ride, the skies opened up with a severe hailstorm, accompanied by threatening lightening bolts. Teams quickly changed to tyres with a spiked tread pattern and riders might have recalled unhappy memories of the week before.

finish. Now I work on my strength and practice more."



Second placed Engstrom was also pleased with his second strong result, consolidating a great ride at Nevegal one week earlier. *"The course was good for me today. I didn't crash, but I couldn't go as fast as I wished. It's good though."*

For his effort, Deldycke was rewarded with third place, **Mikael Pascal** (Sunn-Un) and **Cyril Lagneau** (FRA, Scott Int'l) rounded out the top-five.

It was like the result sheet of old, with seven of the top nine riders from France. Although Vouilloz finished ninth at Les Gets he retains the orange Grundig leader's jersey, although is now only 3 points ahead of Engstrom.

Next Race: World Cup downhill racing now takes two weeks off before crossing the Atlantic to the USA for round four in Big Bear, California. Squaw Valley, which was scheduled to host this stop, is still under a heavy blanket snow, forcing the organisers to move the race to drier conditions.

Source: **Ari Cheren**





place	bib	UCIcode	name/nom	nat	team	int	time	+	points
1	4	FRA19771008	CHAUSSON Anne-caroline	FRA	SUNN		2:53.66 6:33.68		50
2	9	FRA19810819	JONNIER Sabrina	FRA	SINTESI VERLICCHI		3:00.30 6:50.25	16.56	45
3	2	USA19720120	GIOVE Missy	USA	VOLVO/CANNONDALE		2:54.52 6:50.25	16.56	40
4	10	GBR19760801	MORTIMER Helen	GBR	SINTESI VERLICCHI		2:55.28 6:51.81	18.13	36
5	15	ITA19660724	BONAZZI Giovanna	ITA	SINTESI VERLICCHI		2:56.53 6:55.36	21.68	32
6	3	SUI19800725	JORGENSEN Sari	SUI	YETI - SWATCH		3:03.72 6:56.25	22.57	29
7	7	USA19680508	BRUTSAERT Elke	USA	SCHWINN/TOYOTA		3:00.22 6:58.54	24.86	26
8	16	ESP19630711	GONZALEZ Mercedes	ESP	TEAM GT		3:06.36 6:59.89	26.21	23
9	11	FIN19730304	REPO Katja	FIN	SINTESI VERLICCHI		3:03.64 7:00.64	26.95	20
10	58	USA19761128	LLANES Tara	USA	MT DEW/SPECIALIZ		3:03.54 7:00.84	27.16	17
11	5	USA19630731	SONIER Kim	USA	VOLVO CANNONDALE		3:10.46 7:01.25	27.57	15
12	1	USA19711211	DONOVAN Leigh	USA	MONGOOSE		3:02.67 7:03.95	30.26	14
13	13	FRA19780223	LE CAER Nolwen	FRA	TEAM GT		3:09.71 7:04.55	30.87	13
14	51	AUS19750915	MILLER Katrina	AUS	JAMIS/MANITOU/AR		3:08.09 7:07.16	33.47	12
15	14	USA19690419	SHER Lisa	USA	ROTEC		3:07.72 7:09.81	36.13	11
16	57	USA19740502	GRANT Nicole	USA	GIANT		3:05.45 7:12.57	38.88	10
17	18	SUI19700401	KASPER Brigitta	SUI	VOLVO/CANNONDALE		3:13.27 7:17.85	44.17	9
18	19	GBR19790412	MOSELEY Tracy	GBR	VOLVO CANNONDALE		3:11.78 7:18.98	45.30	8
19	6	USA19650624	STREB Marla	USA	YETI		3:16.42 7:19.74	46.06	7

20	23	AUT19670106	MÖSER Florentina	KANGAROO - HEAVY AUT FOODS	3:10.17	7:20.84	47.15	6
21	8	SUI19770322	SANER Marielle	SUI HOT CHILI	3:01.44	7:28.63	54.94	5
22	25	GBR19700503	GUY Emma	GBR RALEIGH	3:07.99	7:31.74	58.05	4
23	59	GER19700326	VALLAZZA Irene	GER TRC BERGMANN	3:26.84	7:35.38	1:01.70	3
24	20	AUT19690108	PHELPS Nathalie	AUT TREK - BIKESTORE	3:11.94	7:40.65	1:06.97	2
25	75	FRA19830128	GROS Céline	FRA	3:09.09	7:58.26	1:24.57	1