

## Stellenbosch- RSA- 4-5.4.98- DH#1- Dazzled by the Sunn

Last year's top mountain bike racing team, **Sunn** (FRA), started the 1998 downhill season in the best possible way: taking wins in both the men's and women's races in the season starter at Stellenbosch.

**Nicolas Vouilloz** and **Anne-Caroline Chausson**, both of whom virtually own the rights to the World Champions title - possessing five and six respectively - asserted themselves over their rivals with impressive victories on a tacky course.

While some observers thought it natural that French riders should triumph in a region famous for its wine produce, others pointed to changes in the course design since last year as the main reason. What had been a relatively nondescript straight-line track most suited to powerful riders, had been altered to an intricate course with switchbacks, drops, berms and plenty of physical challenge in addition.

For the riders and teams, it was an unusual event. After dry, sunny conditions in the preceding week, a downpour on Saturday night made a dramatic change.



What had been five centimetres of dust on the course became slippery mud for the crucial semi-final round on Sunday morning.

Teams scrambled for new tyres to suit the conditions as riders produced semi-final times up to one minute slower than in qualifying the previous evening.

Volvo-Cannondale team manager, Charlie Livermore, explained that his team had been caught out by the rain. *"We ran our regular tyres (Sunday) morning, then changed to a softer compound for the afternoon final."* The softer rubber seemed to be the answer, because his riders **David Vasquez** (ESP) and **Oscar Saiz** (ESP) took second and third places respectively in the men's race.

Vouilloz had a bad start - by his high standards - reporting that he had taken a long time to find his rhythm. After a couple of mistakes he got the feel of the ground beneath him and flowed down the course to a clear win.

**Brian Lopes** (USA, *Mongoose*) had one of the better results of his career, taking sixth place, two ahead of his compatriot, **Eric Carter** (USA, *GT*), while heart

transplant hero, **Dave Cullinan** (USA, *KHS*) stormed into 10th spot.

Time gaps in the women's race were similar to those separating the men. World Champion Chausson was just under four seconds clear of 1995 world champion, **Leigh Donovan** (USA, *Mongoose*). Chausson reported feeling very confident before the final - she had comfortably won the semi-final - and the slippery ground conditions suited her riding style, which like Vouilloz utilises technical brilliance more than raw power.

Third place was taken by **Elke Brutsaert** (USA, *Toyota-Schwinn*), last year's winner. **Marla Streb** (USA, *Yeti*), who broke her ankle here last year in the semi-final before riding to third place in the final, took fifth.

### Statistics

- **Course Length:** 3300m
- **Drop:** 480m
- **Wide Track:** 28%
- **Single Track:** 72%
- **Fast Sections:** 58%
- **Slow Sections:** 42%
- **Ground Conditions:** wet and muddy becoming damp and tacky
- **Weather:** overcast becoming warm and fine
- **Crowd Size:** weekend total 11,000

<i>Pos</i>	<i>bib</i>	<i>Name/nom</i>		<i>nat</i>	<i>WCPTS</i>	<i>UCICODE</i>	<i>Time</i>
1	2	CHAUSSON	ANNE-CAROLINE	FRA	50	FRA19771008	: 4:44.38
2	3	DONOVAN	LEIGH	USA	45	USA19711211	: 4:48.17
3	5	BRUTSAERT	ELKE	USA	40	USA19680805	: 4:52.41
4	1	GIOVE	MISSY	USA	36	USA19720120	: 4:54.71
5	7	STREB	MARLA	USA	32	USA19650624	: 5:00.26
6	8	SONIER	KIM	USA	29	USA19630731	: 5:02.04
7	29	LE CAER	NOLVEN	FRA	26	FRA19780223	: 5:02.81
8	6	GONZALEZ	MERCEDES	ESP	23	ESP19630711	: 5:04.28
9	19	ELLIOTT	CHERI	USA	20	USA19700417	: 5:09.65
10	26	STIEGER	SARAH	SUI	17	SUI19790825	: 5:11.33
11	13	JORGENSEN	SARI	SUI	15	SUI19800725	: 5:12.12
12	4	BONAZZI	GIOVANNA	ITA	14	ITA19660724	: 5:14.23
13	11	SANER	MARIELLE	SUI	13	SUI19770322	: 5:18.62
14	25	VAN MERBEECK	KAREN	GBR	12	GBR19711206	: 5:20.70
15	51	KASPER	BRIGITTA	SUI	11	SUI19700401	: 5:24.38
16	41	GUY	EMMA	GBR	10	GBR19700503	: 5:25.95
17	9	SHER	LISA	USA	9	USA19690419	: 5:26.96
18	60	STIEFL	REGINA	GER	8	GER19661011	: 5:27.27
19	14	LINDGREN	MALIN	SWE	7	SWE19740824	: 5:30.31
20	30	MASUDA	MAMI	JPN	6	JPN19740606	: 5:40.24
21	21	PHelps	NATHALIE	AUT	5	AUT19690108	: 5:49.50
22	28	KURANDOVA	HELENA	CZE	4	CZE19780621	: 6:10.08
23	69	LOMBARDI	MICHELE	RSA	3	RSA19680704	: 6:14.34
24	52	WILTSHIRE	PETRA	GBR	2	GBR19690622	: 7:01.23
25	37	CORSER	KIM	RSA	1	RSA19770718	: 7:14.19