

Barel bombs to messy downhill win

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Sam Hill, Greg Minnaar round out World Cup podium

Three time UCI World Champion Fabien Barel (Subaru) announced his return from a knee injury by becoming the first non-Santa Cruz Syndicate rider of the year to win a World Cup. Greg Minnaar (Santa Cruz Syndicate) took over the World Cup lead from his team-mate Steve Peat after the Englishman flatted on his run.

"I'm just back from this injury, I didn't expect a race like this," said Barel. "I was just trying to put together a consistent run, and I still feel like I am struggling. It is just like a dream."

Markus Pekoll (Solid AClass Factory Team), the seventh rider off in the men's race, was the first to enjoy the Hot Seat for any length of time, keeping the lead through a quarter of the field before Nathan Rankin (Iron Horse-Kenda-Playbiker) finally bumped him out of the lead. However Rankin had only a short time at the top before a succession of riders started cutting the fastest time by tenths or hundredths of a second.

One rider who, surprisingly, didn't take the lead was Chris Kovarik (Chain Reaction), who finished well off the pace.

It took Matti Lehtikainen (MS Evil) to finally make a significant cut in the leading time, with his 3:08.81 the first time to beat UCI World Champion Gee Atherton's (Animal Commencal) best qualifying time. Lehtikainen's time began to look particularly good as rider after rider in the top 25 came close to, but could not beat it.

Fabien Pedemanaud (Scott 11) eventually managed to knock two-tenths of a second off, but his reign was short-lived, with Barel starting two spots behind him. Finally, with 13 riders remaining, it was Barel's turn. The Frenchman, in only his second race back after dislocating his patella before the World Cup opener, left the start house with a brace for support. Hoping to save his season, Barel has finished seven weeks of intensive therapy and strengthening exercises, so that he can compete and not require surgery until the end of the season.

Barel is clearly on a superb run, three seconds ahead by the first time split, five seconds ahead at the second, and 5.28 seconds faster by the finishline. He was also the first rider to surpass 50 kilometres an hour at the speed trap near the bottom of the course.

There were still some big names to go, but it was starting to look like this might be Barel's day after Minnaar could get no closer than two seconds of Barel's time. The biggest threat was likely to be two-time Maribor champion Sam Hill (Monster Energy-Specialized), and he did indeed start strong, clipping over and a second and a half off of Barel's time for the first split. But then he started to slow in the lower half of the course, only three-hundredths ahead at the second time trap, and finishing 71-hundredths down at the finish, bumping Minnaar to third.

Peat, who qualified third fastest, was the next to look like he had a real shot at dislodging Barel, when he also went faster at the first split. But the English rider suffered a rear flat in the second half of the course and did well to finish 38th, 12.61 seconds down.

There were two riders remaining - Justin Leov (Trek World Racing), who was fast enough to slot into fourth, and the final rider, Atherton. Atherton was ahead at the first time split and only five-hundredths slower at the second. This looked to be a very tight finish, until disaster struck in the final

wooded section, when Atherton hit the outside edge of a rutted turn and crashed, losing precious seconds and dropping back to finish 12th.

Peat's flat cost him dearly, dropping him 79 points behind his team mate Minnaar's 914 points in the overall standings, while Hill moves up from fifth to third, 125 points behind Minnaar. Atherton, the former third placed rider in the series, is 13 points behind Hill, while Mick Hannah (GT Bicycles), who missed his first podium of the season, dropped to fifth at 723 points.

The World Cup now takes its first extended break of the season, for five weeks, before resuming with a pair of triples in Mont Ste Anne and Bromont, Canada.

Results		
1	Fabien Barel (Fra) Subaru Mountain Bike Pro Team	0:03:03
2	Samuel Hill (Aus) Monster Energy / Specialized / Mad Catz	0:00:01
3	Greg Minnaar (RSA) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0:00:02
4	Justin Leov (NZl) Trek World Racing	0:00:04
5	Brendan Fairclough (GBr) Monster Energy / Specialized / Mad Catz	0:00:05
6	Fabien Pedemanaud (Fra) Scott 11	0:00:05
7	Steve Smith (Can) MS Evil Racing	0:00:05
8	Matti Lehtikainen (Fin) MS Evil Racing	0:00:05
9	Mitchell Delfs (Aus) Kenda Morewood	0:00:06
10	Andrew Neethling (RSA) Trek World Racing	0:00:06
11	Samuel Blenkinsop (NZl) Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	0:00:06
12	Gee Atherton (GBr) Animal Commencal	0:00:07
13	Rhys Willemse (Aus)	0:00:07
14	Aaron Gwin (USA) Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	0:00:07
15	Bernat Guardia Pascual (Spa) Massi	0:00:07
16	Luke Strobels (USA) Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain Bicycles	0:00:08
17	Nick Beer (Swi) Scott 11	0:00:08
18	Damien Spagnolo (Fra) Subaru Mountain Bike Pro Team	0:00:08
19	Michael Hannah (Aus) GT Bicycles	0:00:08
20	Mickael Pascal (Fra) MSC Bikes	0:00:09
21	Pierre Charles Georges (Fra) Solid Aclass Factory Team	0:00:09
22	Filip Polc (Svk) MS Evil Racing	0:00:09
23	Lorenzo Suding (Ita) Dytech DH	0:00:09
24	Cameron Cole (NZl) Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain Bicycles	0:00:09
25	Josh Bryceland (GBr) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0:00:10
26	Joe Barnes (GBr)	0:00:10
27	Joris Bigoni (Fra)	0:00:10
28	Aurélien Giordanengo (Fra)	0:00:10
29	Nathan Rankin (NZl) Iron Horse-Kenda-Playbiker	0:00:11
30	Markus Pekoll (Aut) Solid Aclass Factory Team	0:00:11
31	Toni Berg (Fin)	0:00:11
32	Maxime Remy (Fra) Suspension Center	0:00:11
33	Robin Wallner (Swe)	0:00:12
34	Duncan Riffle (USA) Duncan Riffle Racing	0:00:12
35	Danny Hart (GBr) Lapierre Powered By Saab Salomon	0:00:12
35	Matthew Simmonds (GBr) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	
37	Rémi Thirion (Fra) Team Sunn	0:00:12
38	Steve Peat (GBr) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0:00:13
39	David Vazquez Lopez (Spa) Lapierre Powered By Saab Salomon	0:00:13
40	Aari Barrett (NZl) Scott 11	0:00:13

41	Will Rischbieth (Aus)	0:00:13
42	Thomas Braithwaite (GBr)	0:00:14
43	Antonio Ferreiro Pajuelo (Spa) XMS-Devinci World Cup Team	0:00:14
44	Bernard Kerr (GBr)	0:00:14
45	Dan Stanbridge (GBr)	0:00:14
46	Benny Strasser (Ger)	0:00:14
46	Chris Kovarik (Aus) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	
48	Nico Vink (Bel)	0:00:14
49	Matthew Scoles (NZL)	0:00:15
50	Jared Rando (Aus) Giant Mountain Bike Team	0:00:15
51	Dominik Gspan (Swi)	0:00:16
52	Joseph Smith (GBr) Kona	0:00:16
53	Sam Dale (GBr)	0:00:16
54	Herman Olund (Swe)	0:00:16
55	Ruaridh Cunningham (GBr) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0:00:17
56	Cesar Rojo (Spa)	0:00:17
57	Joshua Button (Aus)	0:00:17
58	Ben Reid (Irl) Just Reid Race Team	0:00:17
59	Harry Heath (GBr)	0:00:18
60	Marcel Beer (Swi)	0:00:18
61	Vlastimil Hyncica (Cze)	0:00:19
62	Fabien Cousinie (Fra)	0:00:19
63	Martin Mikulenka (Cze)	0:00:19
64	Rémy Charrier (Fra) Team Sunn	0:00:19
65	Carlo Gambirasio (Ita) Surfing Shop	0:00:19
66	Romain Paulhan (Fra)	0:00:20
67	Roman Roschi (Swi)	0:00:20
68	Daniel Wolfe (Irl)	0:00:20
69	Marco Milivinti (Ita) Dytech DH	0:00:20
70	Ben Cathro (GBr)	0:00:21
71	Shaun O'connor (Aus) Iron Horse-Kenda-Playbiker	0:00:21
72	Mario Sieder (Aut) Solid Aclass Factory Team	0:00:21
73	Nejc Rutar (Slo) MBK Orbea	0:00:22
74	Espen Johnsen (Nor)	0:00:22
75	Rick Balbierer (Ger)	0:00:22
76	Ralph Jones (GBr)	0:00:23
77	Kieran Bennett (NZL) X-Fusion-Intense	0:00:24
78	Mathieu Gallean (Fra) Team Sunn	0:00:24
79	David Eme (Fra)	0:00:25
80	Ziga Pandur (Slo)	0:00:25
81	Erik Irmisch (Ger)	0:00:31
82	Will Longden (GBr)	0:01:40
83	Mathias Haas (Aut)	0:02:23