

Atherton takes second win of season

By Tour of Japan published July 24, 2010 – cyclingnews.com

Briton narrows Minnaar's World Cup lead



Gee Atherton (Commencal) soaring to victory. (Image credit: Dave McElwaine/trailwatch.net)

The race for the World Cup title in the men's downhill became a two-horse race on Saturday, at round four in Champéry, Switzerland. Gee Atherton (Commencal) took his second win of the season to pull to within 13 points of Greg Minnaar (Santa Cruz Syndicate), who finished second.

The rain, which had turned the steep 1500 metre course into a slippery mud slide during qualifying, finally backed off for race day, but the damage had been done and, in some ways, the drying conditions made things worse. As the thick mud began to dry, it clung to bikes and turned to the consistency of peanut butter, doubling the weight of bikes and slowing forward momentum to a crawl.

"It was really tough," said Atherton. "You know, some races you really enjoy, and others it's a battle the whole time. This I was just fighting the whole way, the run was hard work; it was like a battle from top to bottom. It was a matter of just finding that line, hanging it out and having it pinned, and not pushing too hard and crashing. I guess I was right on that line and right on the limit the whole time. I was half crashing all the way down the hill, just holding on, and luckily I got it dialed."

Minnaar had similar comments: "It was like Scalextric [model electric cars], it was one big rut the whole way down, so you just had to balance well and ride the rut as best you could."

Only six riders occupied the Hot Seat during the race, starting with the first rider on the course, Ben Cathro, who held the lead for nearly a third of the field before being unseated by Ruairidh Cunningham (Chain Reaction/Intense). Cunningham knocked an impressive 16-plus seconds off of Cathro's time, and was in the Hot Seat for 20 riders before his teammate Chris Kovarik bumped him by mere four-hundredths of a second.

Kovarik held on for 18 riders until U.S. champion Aaron Gwin (Yeti Fox Shox) took the lead down another two seconds.

At this point there were 20 riders still to race, but when Minnaar came through the finish six riders after Gwin and nearly nine seconds faster, it started to look like the World Cup leader had shaken off a poor qualifying run and was on track for his third victory of the season.

However, the South African knew better: "My training run was terrible... getting stuck in the gate with the rain [starting], there's not much we could do about it. But a result's a result, so you just have to move on and try your best and turn it into a positive. So I'm glad to turn it around and improve on that 15th in qualifying. I knew my time was beatable, and not a race-winning run. I'd made costly mistake on an easy section, and I knew I'd lost a lot of time in there, but it was hard to make no mistakes on this track."

Minnaar was correct, as Atherton was fastest through both intermediate splits and flew into the finish nearly three seconds faster than his rival. Only top qualifier Sam Blenkinsop (Lapierre International) was left to ride, and he could not match Atherton's run, slotting into fourth behind Brendan Fairclough (Monster Energy Specialized).

"I'm pretty stoked to put that time in on that track," said Atherton. "I knew Greg had the Hot Seat, and I knew I had my work cut out, and that it was going to be hard to knock him off. It is my second win of the season and I am over the moon right now."

Minnaar continues to lead the World Cup standings with 830 points but, due to his poor qualifier and Atherton's win and second place in qualifying, the British rider is only 13 points back with two races to go.

"I'm holding onto the [World Cup] lead by the skin of my teeth at this point," commented Minnaar, "and with two to go, it's not much of a gap. Gee and I will have to fight it out right to the end."

Race Notes

Nico Vink crashed hard in the men's race, hitting his helmet on the ground. It led to a 20-minute delay while he was airlifted out.

ELITE MEN

1	Gee Atherton (GBr) Commencal	0:04:02.19
2	Greg Minnaar (RSA) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0:00:02.79
3	Brendan Fairclough (GBr) Monster Energy / Specialized / Mad Catz	0:00:04.56
4	Samuel Blenkinsop (NZl) Lapierre International	0:00:04.81
5	Damien Spagnolo (Fra) Mondraker Factory Team	0:00:05.32
6	Brook MacDonald (NZl) MS Evil Racing	0:00:07.34
7	Fabien Pedemanaud (Fra) Scott 11	0:00:10.34
8	Aaron Gwin (USA) Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	0:00:11.56
9	Chris Kovarik (Aus) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0:00:13.71
10	Ruaridh Cunningham (GBr) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0:00:13.75
11	Mickael Pascal (Fra)	0:00:13.77
12	Marc Beaumont (GBr) GT Bicycles	0:00:14.33
13	Matti Lehtikainen (Fin) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0:00:15.78
14	Mitchell Delfs (Aus)	0:00:15.91
15	Nick Beer (Swi) Scott 11	0:00:16.65
16	Shaun O'connor (Aus) Kenda-Playbiker	0:00:16.87
17	Sam Dale (GBr)	0:00:17.31
18	Steve Peat (GBr) Santa Cruz Syndicate	0:00:17.52
19	Pierre Charles Georges (Fra) Solid Aclass Factory Team	0:00:18.46
20	Bryn Atkinson (Aus) World Trail/Specialized	0:00:21.23
21	Bernard Kerr (GBr) Norco World Team	0:00:21.85
22	Danny Hart (GBr) Giant Factory Team	0:00:22.83
23	Cyrille Kurtz (Fra) Team Lac Blanc Massif Des Vosges	0:00:23.96
24	Fabien Cousinie (Fra) Blackmountain Morewood United	0:00:24.28
25	Oliver Burton (GBr)	0:00:24.30
26	Markus Pekoll (Aut) Solid Aclass Factory Team	0:00:24.60
27	Antonio Ferreiro Pajuelo (Spa) XMS Racing Squad	0:00:25.91
28	Matthew Scoles (NZl) Team Cingolani - Protone	0:00:27.55
29	Cédric Gracia (Fra)	0:00:27.88
30	Lorenzo Suding (Ita)	0:00:27.99
31	Richard Thomas (GBr)	0:00:28.49
32	Troy Brosnan (Aus) Monster Energy / Specialized / Mad Catz	0:00:29.02

33	Wyn Masters (NZI) Kenda-Playbike	0:00:29.11
34	Adam Brayton (GBr)	0:00:29.35
35	Cameron Cole (NZI) Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain	0:00:29.84
36	Bernat Guardia Pascual (Spa) Massi Team	0:00:30.07
37	Florent Payet (Fra) Blackmountain Morewood United	0:00:30.09
37	Ben Cathro (GBr) MTBcut.tv	
39	Thibaut Ruffin (Fra) Commencal Superiders	0:00:30.50
40	Steve Smith (Can) MS Evil Racing	0:00:30.63
41	Robin Wallner (Swe) Team Sunn Montgenevre	0:00:30.79
42	Harry Heath (GBr)	0:00:31.21
43	Joseph Smith (GBr) Kona	0:00:32.31
44	Justin Leov (NZI) Trek World Racing	0:00:33.03
45	Matthew Simmonds (GBr) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0:00:33.65
46	Luke Strobel (USA) MS Evil Racing	0:00:34.04
47	Martin Frei (Swi)	0:00:35.51
48	Dennis Dertell (Swe)	0:00:35.64
49	Harry Molloy (GBr) 661/DMR/Last Bikes	0:00:36.62
50	Dan Stanbridge (GBr) Dirt Norco Race Team	0:00:36.86
51	Nejc Rutar (Slo) MBKOrbea	0:00:38.25
52	George Brannigan (NZI) Ancillotti Doganaccia Racing Team	0:00:39.47
53	Scott Mears (GBr)	0:00:39.89
54	Michael Hannah (Aus) GT Bicycles	0:00:40.32
55	Billy Caroli (Swi)	0:00:40.95
56	Faustin Figaret (Fra) Team Sport Bike	0:00:41.15
57	Thomas Braithwaite (GBr)	0:00:41.69
58	Ben Baker (GBr)	0:00:42.54
59	Julien Camellini (Fra) Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	0:00:42.57
60	Robert Smith (GBr)	0:00:43.22
61	Carlo Gambirasio (Ita) Surfing Shop	0:00:43.89
62	Benny Strasser (Ger)	0:00:44.28
63	Andrew Neethling (RSA) Trek World Racing	0:00:44.58
64	Ralph Jones (GBr)	0:00:45.00
65	Ben Reid (Irl) Dirt Norco Race Team	0:00:45.22

66	Thomas Jeandin (Swi)	0:00:46.61
67	Kyle Strait (USA)	0:00:48.03
68	Esteban Deronzier (Fra) Morzine-Avoriaz/Haute-Savoie	0:00:49.38
69	Kristof Lenssens (Bel)	0:00:50.15
70	Yannick Colomb (Fra)	0:00:51.21
71	Matej Charvat (Cze) K.T.R. Racing Team	0:00:52.06
72	Marcelo Gutierrez Villegas (Col)	0:00:52.21
73	Arthur Racaud (Fra) US Cagnes VTT	0:00:52.72
74	Neko Mulally (USA) Trek World Racing	0:00:54.83
75	Joseph Nation (NZl)	0:00:55.44
76	Bertrand Gilles (Bel)	0:00:58.72
77	Romain Paulhan (Fra)	0:01:07.79
78	Duncan Riffle (USA) Giant Factory Team	0:01:08.78
79	Jack Reading (GBr)	0:01:13.53
80	Fergus Lamb (GBr) Perth City Cycles	0:01:14.41
81	Olivier Nicole (Fra)	0:01:16.91
DNF	Nico Vink (Bel)	
DNF	Joris Bigoni (Fra)	

ELITE MEN'S TEAMS

#	Rider Name (Country) Team	Result
1	Chain Reaction Cycles/Intense	85 pts
2	Scott 11	70
3	Santa Cruz Syndicate	48
4	Commencal	40
5	Suspension Center	40
6	Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain	35
7	Monster Energy / Specialized / Mad Catz	32
8	Commencal Superiders	32
9	Norco World Team	32
10	Lapierre International	30
11	Mondraker Factory Team	28
12	Trek World Racing	28
13	MS Evil Racing	26

14	Yeti Fox Shox Factory Race Team	23
15	RC Alpine Commencal Austria	23
16	Morzine-Avoriaz/Haute-Savoie	21
17	GT Bicycles	19
18	Dr-Gravity Union	18
19	Solid Aclass Factory Team	17
20	Kenda-Playbiker	15
21	Giant Factory Team	9
22	Team Lac Blanc Massif Des Vosges	8
23	Blackmountain Morewood United	7
24	XMS Racing Squad	4
25	Team Cingolani - Protone	3