

XC#4 : Grouse Mountain, CAN : 06-07.07.2002

Meirhaeghe Repeats World Cup Win in Canada

Filip Meirhaeghe (BEL, *Specialized*) maintained his winning form to earn a second-straight cross-country victory this week, as the 2000 Olympic silver medallist earned his sixth career world cup victory on a cloudy day in Grouse Mountain, Canada. Meirhaeghe rode a brilliant race to take the lead in lap three, never looking back as he beat **Christoph Sauser** (SUI, *Volvo Cannondale*) by 57 seconds in the seven-lap event.

90 competitors were entered into Sunday afternoon's race, as cloudy and cool weather threatened rain, but never produced any drops during the 1 hour, 49 minute event. Racing on one of the world's most technically challenging courses at Grouse Mountain, the men had to be especially wary of preserving their equipment and preventing flat tyres on the bumpy and rocky track. The race's finishing time was shorter than normal, because of the extreme nature of the course and the toll it took on so many riders. Only 36 riders finished on the lead lap.

Meirhaeghe finished the first lap of the race in 3rd position, after **Lado Fumic** (GER, *Team T-Mobile*) took an early lead with an impressive start. Current World and World Cup Champion - and local favorite - **Roland Green** (CAN, *Trek-Volkswagen*) rode in 2nd position, while **Roel Paulissen** (BEL, *Rainer-Wurz*) and **Christophe Dupouey** (FRA, *Giant*) rode in 4th and 5th, respectively. Paulissen would soon suffer two flat tyres though, and be out of contention along with *Motorex-Bianchi* riders **Julien Absalon** (FRA) (broken chain) and **Jose Hermida** (ESP) (flat tyre).

Round one winner **Bart Brentjens** (NED, *Giant Bicycle*) was in 7th position at this point, while behind rode Sauser in 9th. Sauser had been caught behind a crash at the very start and lost valuable time, but worked hard to move back into contention. In the 3rd lap Meirhaeghe was riding at the front, but was



Filip Meirhaeghe, BEL



Christoph Sauser, SUI

trailed closely by Green, Dupouey and Brentjens, while Sauser moved into 5th position, followed by **Marco Bui** (ITA, *Lanabau/Rainer-Wurz*) and **Kashi Leuchs** (NZL, *Volvo-Cannondale*).

By the end of the 3rd lap Meirhaeghe has broken free of the pack, and was 23 seconds ahead of Green, Brentjens and teammate Dupouey, as Sauser chased alone in 5th at :40 back. Leuchs moved past Bui to take 6th position, as the field produced 15 minute laps over wooden bridges, steep drops and rocky climbs.

At the end of the 4th lap Meirhaeghe increased his lead to 35 seconds over the trio of Green, Dupouey and Brentjens - but Sauser was attacking hard and moved all the way to 2nd position a half lap later.

The sixth lap began with Sauser chasing in 2nd place at :33 seconds, while Dupouey and Brentjens rode together at one minute, Green now riding in 5th place another 13 seconds back, with Leuchs closing in at 6th place.

On the final lap Meirhaeghe rode steadily and maintained his lead of :41 over Sauser, while Brentjens powered away from Dupouey on a descent and chased at 1:19 - Dupouey now 20 seconds behind. Leuchs made contact with Green at this point, just after the two came through to begin the lap. Within minutes Leuchs was in 5th position with Green in 6th at 2:15 back.

Minutes later the race was finished, as Meirhaeghe crossed the line :57 ahead of Sauser, 1:38 ahead of Brentjens and 2:02 ahead of Leuchs. Dupouey had passed a fading Roland Green as well in the final lap, taking the final podium position and finishing at 2:23.

With his win, Meirhaeghe maintains the overall lead ahead of #2-ranked Brentjens, and keeps the blue Tissot leader's jersey going into the 5th and final round of racing in Les Gets, France on September 8th - after the UCI World Championships in Kaprun, Austria at the end of August.



Absalon | Brentjens



Filip Meirhaeghe, 1st Place:

"I got the lead in the 3rd lap, but the chasers were on my wheel, so I knew I had to go. I felt good, but was nervous before the race with only two remaining. I also had a hard choice before the race, deciding between a full suspension and a hardtail on this course. I chose the hardtail, which wasn't as good on the descents but was better on the climbs. I also use more pressure in my tires, which is harder on the descents."

"I like longer courses, but this race was good. It's also uneven, and it's hard to find your rhythm because you're always changing from climbing to descending. If it's not the most challenging course on the world cup, it's close."

Christoph Sauser, 2nd Place:

"I felt good today, but had a bad start when I had to stop because of a crash in front of me at the beginning. I was last into the first descent and had to push really hard to move up. Filip was always up there and I just wished I had been up there with him. Unless he had a problem or a flat, he'd win - so I also rode a safe race."

Bart Brentjens, 3rd Place:

"With two laps left I still felt good with enough energy to go, so I dropped Christophe [Dupouey] near the finish. But he almost came back again. The new parts of the course were a challenge, and I lost a couple seconds on the drop-offs. I couldn't follow Sauser on the downhills - I know my limits."

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