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Germany's Spitz Wins First World Cup

Sabine Spitz (GER, Merida) used amazing technical skills and a little bit of luck on Saturday to win her career's first world cup race, when the Tissot-UCI Mountain Bike World Cup came to Grouse Mountain for the second year and provided an exciting fourth round. After race leader **Annabella Stropparo** (ITA, Be-One) flattened her rear tyre in the 4th lap, Spitz moved from second place to the lead and held on for a spectacular win.

53 women raced six laps of a highly technical course at the top of Grouse Mountain, a ski resort overlooking downtown Vancouver in scenic British Columbia. With warm weather and sunny blue skies gracing the tree-lined course, riders had much less mud to contend with than if it had rained. Yet they still had many difficult obstacles to clear each lap, with rock drops and even a fallen tree standing between them and the finish line of this "North Shore-style" course.

The challenges took their toll on many riders. 6th-ranked **Barbara Blatter** (SUI, Specialized) crashed in the first start loop. Then several riders suffered flat tyres, including 16th-ranked **Jimena Florit** (ARG, RLX Polo Sport), local favorite **Marie-Helene Premont** (CAN) and **Gunn-Rita Dahle** (NOR, Merida International) in the final lap.

But the most dramatic flat tire was suffered by Stropparo, who was leading Spitz in the fourth lap when she suffered a flat rear tyre. Stropparo had taken the lead immediately from the gun, building up 20 seconds just one week after winning her first race in round three. Spitz kept to within 20 seconds of Stropparo, while **Alison Sydor** (CAN, Trek-Volkswagen) chased in 3rd position and **Alison Dunlap** (USA, Luna Chix) in 4th during lap two.

Dunlap, who was wearing the blue jersey of the series leader, was looking for a strong finish to maintain her lead and perhaps win the championship this season. And so in the



Sabine Spitz, GER



Alison Sydor, CAN

3rd lap the order remained the same with Spitz at 20 seconds, but Sydor began to fade away from the lead and rode at 1:15, while Gunn-Rita Dahle (NOR, Merida International) chased for a podium position behind Dunlap - 2:30 off Stropparo's lead at this point.

Stropparo flatted her tyre soon afterward and was passed by Spitz but continued to race, and within minutes was again in the chase at the back of the pack with a freshly repaired rear wheel. Spitz assumed the lead, while Sydor moved into 2nd position at 1:50 back. Dunlap was 2:55 back, just under a minute from Sydor, while Dahle rode in 4th position at 3:30. **Sue Haywood** (USA, Trek-Volkswagen) rode in 5th position, 4:45 from the lead and Stropparo was now several positions from the top-five, approximately 6 minutes off the lead.

An hour and a half into the race and during lap five, Spitz increased her lead over Sydor to 2:10, while Dunlap closed in on second position and reduced her gap to 2:30 - just 20 seconds from Sydor. Dahle was in 4th at 3:20, Haywood riding at 5:50.

The final lap saw Spitz secure her win, while Dunlap caught and passed Sydor after the steep rock drop. Sydor stayed with Dunlap during the technical descents of the lap's first half, but couldn't hang on during the final climb of the lap as they headed toward the finish line. Dahle suffered her flat tire at this point, allowing Haywood to pass her for 4th position, while Stropparo continued her strong riding to move into 5th position - completing an unlikely return to the podium.

Riding to the finishline, Spitz was all smiles as she lifted up her bike and completed her career's goal of a world cup win, describing it as *"amazing."*

"I had goose-bumps on that last climb," she smiled. "I tried to ride safely and not puncture. When I saw Annabella had flatted, I thought 'OK, now it's my time to lead.'"

Asked what the key was for success on this track, Spitz replied *"In mountain biking you have to have a little luck. My goals for this season were top five overall, and maybe a win. So I prepared for that and this was a perfect course for me. I lost my concentration a bit on the last laps, but didn't have any problems or crashes."*



Alison Dunlap, USA



Dunlap held on to her momentum to secure 2nd place, 2:06 from the finish and with 200 more valuable world cup points toward the championship. "My first priority was to protect the jersey today," said Dunlap. "I stayed within my limits early in the race - I remembered that a lot of riders had problems last year, so I didn't want to go out too hard too early."

Asked what she thought when she heard that 3rd-ranked Stropparo had punctured, Dunlap replied "I got a smile on my face!"

Sydor held on for 3rd place, completing a strong ride after a disappointing race last week here in her home country of Canada. "I definitely wanted the podium here," she said. "Dunlap went by me on that last lap on the final climb, but I hung on until the finish, and am happy to put some bad luck in previous races behind me."

In the overall standings, Dunlap is now 75 points ahead of #2 Spitz, while Stropparo is 170 points away, 3rd overall. "If Sabine wins the finals in France," said Dunlap "I have to finish at least in the top 7 to secure the overall."

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