

XC#3 : Mont-Sainte-Anne, CAN : 29-30.06.2002

Meirhaeghe and Stropparo Win Mont Sainte-Anne Cross-Country

Annabella Stropparo (ITA, Be-One) won her career's first-ever world cup cross-country race Sunday, when she and multi-winner **Filip Meirhaeghe** (BEL, Specialized) added their names to the list of legends who have won on this long running course. As thousands of spectators looked on, racing took place on a warm and humid Sunday afternoon, on a very technical and difficult 5.7 km course around this green mountain resort.

With the cross-country portion of the Tissot-UCI Mountain Bike World Cup now more than half over, the race for championship points has heated up, as Alison Dunlap (USA, Luna Chix) takes the overall lead. Racing was fierce for every position today, as most of the top riders in the world came to North America for these two Canadian races.

MEN: Soon after the women completed their five laps, it was time for the 92 men to campaign six laps in the warm summer sun. And, after a high-speed and dusty start loop on a relatively flat circuit around the infield, it was time for the steep opening climb that defines this Mont Sainte-Anne course.

In the first lap a group of ten distinguished themselves by pulling away from the pack. Included in the group was 1998 World Champion **Christophe Dupouey** (FRA, Giant), current World Champion **Roland Green** (CAN, Trek-Volkswagen), winner from round 2 **Christoph Sauser** (SUI, Volvo Cannondale), **Lado Fumic** (GER, Team T-Mobile), **Julien Absalon** (FRA, Motorex-Bianchi) - and world cup winner **Filip Meirhaeghe** (BEL, Specialized). Several seconds back, **Ryder Hesjedal** (CAN, Subaru Gary Fisher) chased for the lead group, while the remaining riders were strung around the course.



Start



Filip Meirhaeghe, BEL

"I felt strong, but figured that Dupouey and Sauser would be stronger," said Meirhaeghe afterward. "I thought they'd be tough today."

"I did feel good," confirmed Dupouey. "It's been more than a year since I had this good a sensation. It was a mistake to follow Filip though, I was riding too safely as I was afraid I would blow."

This situation remained for lap two, as the group stayed mostly together while changing positions within. By the third lap Meirhaeghe and Sauser had moved to the front, getting a slight gap on the others. Green, Fumic and Dupouey were riding as a trio 30 seconds back, while **Seamus McGrath** (CAN, Haro/Lee Dungarees) rode alone in 6th position, followed by Absalon, Bui, Brentjens and Hesjedal.

The fourth lap was the defining moment of the race, as Sauser flatted on the first rocky descent of the lap as he and another former downhill in Meirhaeghe flew down the descent, 34 seconds in the lead. Sauser would eventually abandon, giving Meirhaeghe an added mental boost as he found himself riding alone and in the front. Behind him, Fumic, Dupouey and Green chased, while Bui and Absalon were at 2:07 back.

"I was hammering full gas on the climbs, and taking it easy on the descents. So when Susi flatted, I had open road" said Meirhaeghe. "I felt strong on the uphill as well as the technical sections, and the heat didn't bother me."

In lap five Meirhaeghe added to his lead, riding through the course's most technical root section with 1:30 on 2nd place Fumic and 1:40 on Dupouey - both of whom ran through the section that - of the leaders - only Meirhaeghe and Sauser were able to ride.

Absalon and Hesjedal were riding together at this point, 3:25 from the lead, while Fumic rode another 35 seconds back, Green chasing him closely. Roel Paulissen and McGrath were in 8th and 9th, 4:26 from the lead.

In the sixth lap Dupouey passed Fumic to take over 2nd position, while Absalon dropped Hesjedal to secure 4th position - Hesjedal in 5th. And, with Meirhaeghe riding clear of the pack and the podium seeming set, a



Dupouey | Meirhaeghe



Filip Meirhaeghe, BEL

secondary race developed behind the podium positions in the final lap.

Roland Green attacked a quartet of riders, which included McGrath, Paulissen and Kashi Leuchs (NZL, Volvo-Cannondale). McGrath tried to control Paulissen to let his fellow Canadian gain points and go for the podium - as Green finished 6th, McGrath 7th and Paulissen 8th.

Minutes later Meirhaeghe finished in 1st, after 2 hours, 1:18 of racing. Dupouey finished 2nd at 2:03:32, while Fumic, Absalon and Hesjedal rounded out the podium.

For Meirhaeghe, who recently won a Swiss MTB race and finished 17th in the Tour of Austria, this race represents his return to form. "Last year was a struggle for me after the Olympics, and this winter I trained more and was able to do better - it's been on my mind to win here, as this is one of my favorite courses and I wanted a win in North America."

"This was good race for me," added third place Fumic. "I had a difficult week where I broke two of my fingers, so it was hard to grip the bars. The course was maybe too hard, and I lost control in the downhills."

With his win this week, Meirhaeghe took over the leader's jersey, with Brentjens and Paulissen next in the ranking.

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