

## 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.

**WOMEN:** #7-ranked **Annabella Stropparo** (ITA, *Be-One*) has ridden at the front of world cup races plenty of times in her long career, but never like today as the women began five hard laps. Always something has happened to thwart her chances at victory, be it a mechanical problem, a crash or simply lack of staying power. So when she and another fast starter, #2-ranked **Caroline Alexander** (GBR, *GBR Nat'l Team*) took off from the front, people such as world cup champion **Barbara Blatter** (SUI, *Specialized*) chased cautiously.

With #1-ranked **Marga Fullana** (ESP, *Orbea*) missing these North American races, Alexander was looking forward to taking over the overall lead. She rode aggressively from the start in pursuit of the leader's jersey, as well as a strong end to what may have been the final world cup race of her career. But Stropparo shadowed her in the first lap, as Alexander had troubles with the course's many roots, rocks and technical sections - as well as a slippery section of the opening climb - moving to 5th position by the second lap.



Annabella Stropparo, ITA



Barbara Blatter, SUI

Stropparo took over the lead with **Barbara Blatter** (SUI, Specialized) 20 seconds behind her. **Jimena Florit** (ARG, RLX Polo Sport), who recently won a pair of U.S. championship races, rode in 3rd position at one minute back, with her training partner and friendly rival (and current World Champion) **Alison Dunlap** (USA, Luna Chix) in 4th position another 30 seconds back. **Sabine Spitz** (GER, Merida) was riding in 5th position in this lap, while **Regina Marunde** (GER, Focus) and local favorite **Marie-Helene Premont** (CAN) battled for 6th.

Positions settled down in the third lap, as Blatter chased at 0:15, Florit at 1:05 and Dunlap at 1:30. Spitz rode at 1:50 back, with Marunde and Premont together still at 2:20. In the 4th lap Stropparo increased her lead over Blatter to 30 seconds, as Florit chased at 1:45 and Dunlap now at 2:20. Stropparo was having the ride of her career, but secretly worried that something would again happen to ruin her chances of the win. But she didn't ride like it, adding to her lead with each muddy forest section, or steep climb.

In the final lap Stropparo maintained her lead of 30 seconds over Blatter, but Florit was being caught by Dunlap, who made contact with her with one km to go. She finally passed Florit just before the finish line, moving into 3rd place by one second over Florit, who finished 4th place - while Spitz finished 5th.

Breaking down into tears after her win, Stropparo said she had been waiting for her first win *for a long time*. *"You don't know how happy I am!" she exclaimed, adding "All the race I was waiting for something to go wrong, I didn't know what would happen. But when you have good legs you can do it."*

She added *"The last half lap I was just enjoying it. On the last downhill I rode hard - every part of the course was difficult today, and it was important not to crash or break equipment."*

Second place Blatter said *"I'm really happy with this result. Annabella was too strong today - at the end I was not strong enough to attack. If you're in such good shape it's not possible to be caught. But for me, to be back in shape is the most important thing."* Dunlap was happy to finish third and gather needed points toward the championship. *"I*



Alison Dunlap, USA



Annabella Stropparo, ITA

*caught Jimena on the last climb - she was just ahead of me and ran a great race. I felt good; smooth and consistent, and my legs really came around. Now I'm looking forward to next week's world cup before the finals in France."*

*For Florit, 4th place represented her career's best finish, which she was pleased with. "You always try to stay at 100% the whole race, but I could see that Alison was behind me and that my time was coming - I just wanted the podium."*

*Dunlap is now 20 points ahead of Fullana in the overall, and could go into the finals with a nearly insurmountable lead over Fullana if she does well in next week's world cup in Vancouver.*

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