

Absalon takes World Cup career win number 21

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Hermida and Kabush round out top three

Julien Absalon (Orbea) claimed victory on a rain-slicked course in the fifth round of the Mountain World Cup at Mont Ste Anne, Quebec. This was the fourth consecutive World Cup victory of this season for him.

Absalon has always performed well at Mont Ste Anne, going back to his World title in the Junior category in 1998. "I was concerned at the start of the race," said Absalon. "Through the first two turns at the start I wasn't in a good position. Through the first lap I tried to work my way up. Näf was very strong at the beginning of the race but he started to drop back and I took the lead.

"I had to work hard not to make mistakes," he added. "It was really, really slippery out there. It was a very technical track, but I like that. To win here under these conditions is very satisfying."

A large men's field of 104 riders took the line for a total of six laps. The off-and-on rain that had plagued the women had fortunately stopped by the time the men started. The clouds remained low all afternoon and it looked like the heavens would open at any moment but they never did, much to the relief of the riders. However, it did remain windy and cool for the duration, and the track was still wet from the morning's downpour.

Without a start loop, the whole key for many was to try and get to the front from the gun. The start was done at very high speed by the field. Ralph Näf (Multivan Merida Biking Team) took the early lead, followed at 15 seconds by Martin Gujan (Cannondale Factory Racing) at the front of a large chase group.

Näf was still holding the lead at the end of lap one, with Geoff Kabush (Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain Bicycles) in second at 32 seconds and Absalon 41 seconds back in third. Just behind Absalon was a small group with Gujan, Nino Schurter (Scott-Swisspower) and José Hermida (Multivan Merida).

Absalon had become comfortable with the conditions by the second lap and had caught and passed Kabush. He continued to gain time on the lead as Näf started to tire. Meanwhile, Hermida was slowly reeling in the leaders. By lap three, Näf had only one second on Absalon, with Kabush at 20 seconds and about to be caught by Hermida. It didn't take long for Absalon to take the lead and once he was at the front he started to open a gap on the chasers. Meanwhile Näf continued to go backward, dropping to fourth by the end of the lap.

Absalon was riding comfortably in the second half of the race, followed by Hermida at 29 seconds, Kabush at 32 seconds, and Näf at 58 seconds. In fifth was a surprising U23 rider - Alexis Vuillermoz (LaPierre International). Jean-Christophe Peraud (Massi), Todd Wells (Specialized), and Burry Stander (Specialized) were chasing just behind Vuillermoz.

With the top four firmly in place, the battle for the final podium spot was all that was left. The first to put on a charge was Stander, who by the fifth lap had moved up after his U23 opponent Vuillermoz hit the wall after a strong start and rapidly dropped out of the top 10 to finish 19th. Also blowing up was Wells, who fell to 15th by the finish after riding as high as fifth.

Creating even more excitement was a last lap flat by Näf, who lost some time to Stander initially but then charged back to maintain his fourth place. Course conditions hadn't improved much, with even the lead motorbike crashing on the top of the rocky descent.

Absalon cruised in with a winning time of 2:06:05, 32 seconds up on Hermida and 2:48 up on Kabush. A tired Näf had enough left in the tank to retain fourth, 4:50 back. Stander claimed fifth (and the U23 win) 5:42 behind.

Two years ago Hermida also placed second to Absalon, with Kabush also third. Last year it was Absalon winning, with Kabush in second. Clearly this venue favours Absalon, Hermida and Kabush.

Hermida, one of the most congenial racers on the circuit, also liked his result. "I lost some time at the beginning of the race," said Hermida. "It was quite complicated and it was important without a start loop. I should have been more focused on the start. Julian and I both lost time. Overall, I thought I could catch him.

"In the beginning he had a gap of 30 seconds and it didn't change during the race so I thought I could attack and get him on the final lap, but it didn't happen," he added.

Kabush was pleased by his result. His season hasn't been up the standards he has set in recent years. "I have a history of doing really well here. I started on the third row so I was really focused on the start," said Kabush. "I got a really good start and I was climbing really well. This is a course that really suits me. The World Cup has been up and down this year and I'm happy to have a good result for my team.

"It's been a while," added Kabush. "It felt good to be back in the action. Being back in North America has been good for me. I feel grounded again. I'm 100-percent healthy now."

In the World Cup Points Series, Absalon has a 480-point lead over second place Stander. Hermida moved up to third from sixth with his placing here, while Kabush jumped 10 spots to 14th.

Results

1	Julien Absalon (Fra) Orbea	2:06:05
2	José Antonio Hermida Ramos (Spa) Multivan Merida Biking Team	0:00:32
3	Geoff Kabush (Can) Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain Bicycles	0:02:48
4	Ralph Naef (Swi) Multivan Merida Biking Team	0:04:50
5	Burrry Stander* (RSA) Specialized Factory Racing	0:05:42
6	Florian Vogel (Swi) Scott-Swisspower MTB-Racing	0:07:11
7	Lukas Flückiger (Swi) Trek World Racing	0:07:16
8	Ivan Alvarez Gutierrez (Spa) Giant Italia Team	0:07:21
9	Martin Gujan (Swi) Cannondale Factory Racing	0:07:45
10	Stéphane Tempier (Fra) TX Active Bianchi	0:07:48
11	Sergio Mantecon Gutierrez (Spa) Cemelorca-Trek-Lorca Taller Del Tiempo	0:08:16
12	Adam Craig (USA) Giant Mountain Bike Team	0:08:20
13	Nino Schurter (Swi) Scott-Swisspower MTB-Racing	0:08:43
14	Cédric Ravanel (Fra) Lapierre International	0:08:47
15	Todd Wells (USA) Specialized Factory Racing	0:08:53
16	Jaroslav Kulhavy (Cze)	0:09:05
17	Moritz Milatz (Ger) Multivan Merida Biking Team	0:09:20
18	Jiri Friedl (Cze) Merida Biking Team	0:09:36
19	Alexis Vuillermoz* (Fra) Lapierre International	0:09:43
20	Martin Fanger* (Swi) Giant Mountain Bike Team	0:10:16
21	Christoph Sauser (Swi) Specialized Factory Racing	0:10:45
22	Chris Jongewaard (Aus) Trek-Brentjens Mountainbike Racing Team	0:10:49
23	Rudi Van Houts (Ned) Multivan Merida Biking Team	0:11:19
24	Samuel Schultz (USA) Subaru-Gary Fisher	
25	Seamus Mcgrath (Can)	0:12:13
26	Jeremy Horgan-Kobelski (USA) Subaru-Gary Fisher	0:12:44
27	Lukas Kaufmann* (Swi)	0:12:53
28	Pierre Geoffroy Plantet (Fra) Lapierre International	0:13:13
29	Jan Skarnitzl (Cze) Giant Mountain Bike Team	0:13:31
30	Derek Zandstra (Can)	0:13:39
31	François Bailly Maitre (Fra) Team Scott Valloire Galibier	0:14:05
32	Ludovic Dubau (Fra)	0:14:20
33	Raphael Gagne* (Can) Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain Bicycles	0:14:26
34	Christof Bischof (Swi) ISD Cycling Team	0:14:53
35	Roel Paulissen (Bel) Cannondale Factory Racing	0:15:06
36	Guillaume Vinit* (Fra) Team Scott Valloire Galibier	0:15:17
37	Wolfram Kurschat (Ger) Topeak Ergon Racing Team	0:15:42
38	Irjan Luttenberg* (Ned)	0:15:56
39	Maxime Marotte (Fra) BH-Suntour	0:16:25
40	Bjorn Brems (Bel) Team Saeco	0:17:12
41	Christoph Soukup (Aut) Merida Biking Team	0:17:34
42	Giuseppe Lamastra (Ita)	0:17:50
43	Michael Broderick (USA)	0:17:59
44	Bas Peters (Ned)	
45	Matous Ulman (Cze) Scott & Hagget MTB Team	0:18:31
46	Stefan Widmer (Can)	0:19:17
47	Marc Colom (Fra)	0:19:59
48	Milan Spesny (Cze) Ceska Sportelna MTB	0:20:20
49	Josef Kamler* (Cze) Ceska Sportelna MTB	0:20:35

50	Fabien Canal* (Fra) Lapierre International	0:22:06
-1lap	Renay Groustra (RSA)	
-1lap	Kris Sneddon (Can) Kona	
-1lap	Carl Decker (USA) Giant Mountain Bike Team	
-1lap	Robert Mennen (Ger)	
-1lap	Robbie Squire* (USA)	
-1lap	Matthew Hadley (Can)	
-1lap	Rotem Ishai (Isr)	
-1lap	Barry Wicks (USA) Kona	
-1lap	Lachlan Norris* (Aus) Discovertasmania.com	
-1lap	Colin Cares* (USA)	
-1lap	Martin Lazarski (Can)	
-1lap	Julien Fillion (Can)	
-1lap	Adam Snyder (USA)	
-1lap	Cristobal Silva Ibaceta (Chi)	
-1lap	Andrew Watson (Can)	
-2laps	Manuel Prado Gutierrez (CRc)	
-2laps	Pierre Lebreton (Fra) BH-Suntour	
-2laps	Jiri Hudecek (Cze) Scott & Hagget MTB Team	
-2laps	Andrew Blair (Aus)	
-2laps	Leni Trudel* (Can)	
-2laps	Craig Richey (Can)	
-2laps	Eric Batty (Can)	
-2laps	Patxi Cia Apezteguia (Spa) Conor - Camping La Siesta	
-2laps	Cal Britten* (Aus) Torq Performance Nutrition	
-2laps	Charlton Durie* (Aus) Discovertasmania.com	
-2laps	Andrew Freye (USA)	
-2laps	Mark Leishman (NZl)	
-2laps	Paul Van Der Ploeg* (Aus) Discovertasmania.com	
-2laps	Juan Pedro Trujillo Hernandez (Spa) Cemelorca-Trek-Lorca Taller Del Tiempo	
-2laps	Ryan Atkins* (Can)	
-2laps	Travis Livermon* (USA)	
-2laps	Niels Wubben* (Ned)	
-2laps	Nick Both (Aus)	
-2laps	Mike Garrigan (Can)	
-2laps	Ethan Gilmour* (USA)	
-2laps	Cameron Jette* (Can)	
-2laps	Stephen Ettinger* (USA)	
-2laps	Peter Glassford (Can)	
-3laps	Daniel Sessford (Can)	
-3laps	Victor Galvez Perez (Chi)	
-3laps	Aaron Snyder* (USA)	
DNF	Jean-Christophe Peraud (Fra) Massi	
DNF	Umberto Corti (Ita) Team Cbe Tecnoimpianti A.S.D.	
DNF	Marco Aurelio Fontana (Ita) Cannondale Factory Racing	
DNF	Oliver Beckingsale (GBr) Giant Mountain Bike Team Gmt	
DNF	Max Plaxton (Can)	
DNF	Benoit Simard (Can)	
DNF	Connor Mcconvey* (Irl) De Brink-Ten Tusscher	
DNF	Nathan Haas* (Aus) Discovertasmania.Com	
DNF	Daniel Mcconnell (Aus) Torq Performance Nutrition	
DNF	Carlos Coloma Nicolas (Spa) MSC Bikes	
DNF	Liam Killeen (GBr) Trek World Racing	
DNF	Troy Wells (USA)	

DNF	Brian Bain (Can)		
DNS	Jochen Kass (Ger) Multivan Merida Biking Team		
Teams			
1	Multivan Merida Biking Team	87	pts
2	Specialized Factory Racing	54	
3	Scott-Swisspower MTB-Racing	44	
4	Orbea	40	
5	Team Maxxis-Rocky Mountain Bicycles	32	
6	Giant Mountain Bike Team	32	
7	Lapierre International	32	
8	Trek World Racing	24	
9	Giant Italia Team	23	
10	Cannondale Factory Racing	22	
11	TX Active Bianchi	21	
12	Cemelorca-Trek-Lorca Taller Del Tiempo	20	
13	Merida Biking Team	13	
14	Subaru-Gary Fisher	12	
15	Trek-Brentjens Mountainbike Racing Team	9	