

Mountain Bike World Championships – CM Val di Sole, Italy, June 17-22, 2008

Elite men downhill finals *By Sue George in Val di Sole, Italy*

Atherton scores Britain's third gold medal in a day

Gee Atherton brought home Great Britain's third gold medal of the day when he won the elite men's downhill World Championship. As the final rider down the mountain on a technical and steep, but completely dry 2.25 km course, all eyes were on him. On a day of many small mistakes and more than the usual number of crashes, Atherton rode a consistent race to victory. On his way to the win, he ousted compatriot Steve Peat from the hot seat.

"It's hard for me to say where was critical on the run where I won. It was a track you had to be on the gas all the way down," said Atherton. "My run wasn't perfect, and I made mistakes, but obviously it was a track where you could afford to make a few. It paid to be consistent."

Peat came to within just 2.62 seconds of the title that continues to elude him after favorite Sam Hill (Australia) crashed on the final turn and neither Justin Leov (New Zealand) nor Greg Minnaar (South Africa) went faster. Last year's World Champion Hill was up by more than six and a half seconds at one point during his run. Despite his crash, he made an amazing recovery and remounted quickly enough to finish his run and hold on for bronze.

At the beginning, Australian Amiel Cavelier, the seventh racer of the day, spent the first significant amount of time in the hot seat. After him, the French traded turns. First up was Fabien Pedemanaud, the 27th starter, who clocked a 3.21.46 - a time that held up for ninth on the day and until 70th starter Fabien Barel logged 3.17.92 for an eventual fifth place.

The runs continued, with no one able to surpass Barel until veteran Peat put in the new best time of 3.14.72. On his way down, the video feed at the start finish line dropped out, leaving the crowd wondering about his status and booing, but when the feed picked back up further down the run, Peat was up by more than a second, and the crowd went wild.

At the end of his run, he took over the lead, convincingly besting Barel's time by over three seconds. Everyone wondered if it would be Peat's year to win the worlds, but he wasn't so sure.

"When I first came down, I knew I'd made a mistake up there," said Peat. "I didn't think my time would stick long."

Next up, Mickael Pascal and Samuel Blenkinsop, gave it a go, but neither went faster than Peat. Then it was turn of the 2007 World Champion, Sam Hill. Hill blasted down throughout his run and drew gasps from the crowd when the second time check showed him up by more than six seconds. It looked like he was on track to repeat his title as he was riding fluidly and powerfully over the roots faster than anyone had previously.

The mostly wooded track didn't open up until the very bottom, where it was visible for the duration. Hill was like a missile coming down the final stretch when he washed out his front wheel on the final bend.

"Everyone stepped it up for worlds," said Hill reflecting afterward. "I was trying to put it all together and it was going well until that last corner."

Amid gasps and groans from the spectators, Hill didn't skip a beat and was back up on his bike and racing again in no time. His crash cost him the win, but his post-crash haste kept him in medal contention and placed him right behind Peat in second place with one rider to go and a time of 3.15.27.

"I lost my front wheel and I slid out," said Hill evenly after the race. He didn't know he was winning at the time, but he said, "I knew I was having a really good run, and I wanted to salvage as much as I could [after my crash]." Fortunately, Hill was not seriously injured in the fall; he told *Cyclingnews* that he suffered only minor grazes.

"I thought this could be my year," said Peat of what he was thinking of his chances with just one rider to go.

Neither Justin Leov (New Zealand) nor Greg Minnaar (South Africa) could overtake Peat on their runs, and so Atherton was the last man off, ready to answer the question of which British rider would be the 2008 World Champion. While Peat nervously watched from below, Atherton gracefully descended on his journey down to the finish floating over drops, roots and everything that where many others looked to be working.

A time check showed Atherton was up by two seconds. If he could hold it together, until the end he would have gold, and that was exactly what he did for the win in 3.12.12.

"The World Championships are real," smiled Gee after he realized he'd won. "I've worked so hard for this."

"I'm happy for Gee, but it'd have been better if it'd been the other way around for me," said second place Peat. Atherton's performance bumped Hill into the bronze medal spot.

Peat congratulated the new World Champion. Atherton's sister Rachel, herself the newly crowned women's downhill World Champion, ran out to the finish to hug her brother and begin the family's celebrations. Both were instantly swamped by TV cameras excited to capture the family's success.

The dual World Championship comes just weeks after the World Cup round in Andorra where the siblings historically won the men's and women's downhill while their brother Dan also won the 4X. Unfortunately, Dan had to sit out the competition this week after breaking his collarbone.

Results

1	Gee Atherton (Great Britain)	3.12.12
2	Steve Peat (Great Britain)	0.02.62
3	Samuel Hill (Australia)	0.03.15
4	Greg Minnaar (South Africa)	0.05.22
5	Fabien Barel (France)	0.05.80
6	Justin Leov (New Zealand)	0.05.84
7	Mickael Pascal (France)	0.08.00
8	Julien Camellini (France)	0.09.19
9	Fabien Pedemanaud (France)	0.09.34
10	Ivan Oulego Moreno (Spain)	0.14.74
11	Bernat Guardia Pascual (Spain)	0.14.75
12	Chris Kovarik (Australia)	0.14.96
13	Kieran Bennett (New Zealand)	0.16.41
14	Brendan Fairclough (Great Britain)	0.16.94
15	Marco Milivinti (Italy)	0.17.49
16	Marcel Beer (Switzerland)	0.18.00
17	Samuel Blenkinsop (New Zealand)	0.18.86
18	Amiel Cavalier (Australia)	0.19.44
19	Marcus Klausmann (Germany)	0.19.50
20	Alan Beggin (Italy)	0.19.53
21	Nathan Rennie (Australia)	0.19.61
22	Cameron Cole (New Zealand)	0.20.08
23	Pasqual Canals Flix (Spain)	0.20.34
24	Cole Bangert (United States Of America)	0.20.50
25	Wyn Masters (New Zealand)	0.20.79
26	Ben Cathro (Great Britain)	0.21.62
27	Damien Spagnolo (France)	0.21.70
28	Lorenzo Suding (Italy)	0.22.70
29	Ben Reid (Ireland)	0.23.20
30	Markolf Berchtold (Brazil)	0.23.72
31	Nico Vink (Belgium)	0.23.89
32	Duncan Riffle (United States Of America)	0.24.71
33	John Swanguen (United States Of America)	0.24.86
34	Toni Berg (Finland)	0.25.05
35	Dominik Gspan (Switzerland)	
36	Andrew Mitchell (Canada)	0.25.10
37	Maciej Jodko (Poland)	0.25.26
38	Hans Lambert (Canada)	0.25.77
39	Nick Beer (Switzerland)	0.25.87
40	Will Rischbieth (Australia)	0.28.50
41	Bryn Atkinson (Australia)	0.30.06
42	Mathias Haas (Austria)	0.30.09
43	Frank Schneider (Germany)	0.30.28
44	Samuel Zbinden (Switzerland)	0.30.46
45	Jurgen Beneke (Germany)	0.30.75
46	Jared Rando (Australia)	0.30.78

47	Oscar Saiz Castane (Spain)	0.30.92
48	Bruno Zanchi (Italy)	0.31.06
49	Claudio Loureiro (Portugal)	0.32.17
50	Michael Skinner (New Zealand)	0.32.80
51	Maicon Zottis (Brazil)	0.33.11
52	Daniel Wolfe (Ireland)	0.34.86
53	Cody Warren (United States Of America)	0.35.10
54	Filip Polc (Slovakia)	0.35.75
55	Florent Payet (France)	0.36.04
56	Patrick Meyer (Switzerland)	0.36.14
57	Greg O'keefe (Ireland)	0.36.86
58	Luca Bertocchi (Italy)	0.37.29
59	Carlo Gambirasio (Italy)	0.37.31
60	Marco Fidalgo (Portugal)	0.37.34
61	Aki Farm (Finland)	0.37.52
62	Mario Jo Jarrin Molina (Ecuador)	0.37.62
63	Renato Ventura (Portugal)	0.39.23
64	Luka Novak (Slovenia)	0.39.81
65	Kain Leonard (United States Of America)	0.40.75
66	Jonty Neethling (South Africa)	0.41.81
67	Emanuel Pombo (Portugal)	0.42.41
68	Gundars Osis (Latvia)	0.43.43
69	Lars Sternberg (United States Of America)	0.44.28
70	Santiago De Santiago (Argentina)	0.45.69
71	Wataru Koyama (Japan)	0.45.83
72	Kyle Strait (United States Of America)	0.46.71
73	Arkadiusz Perin (Poland)	0.47.51
74	Karlis Kisuro (Latvia)	0.48.92
75	Martins Sprogis (Latvia)	0.52.40
76	Takuya Aoki (Japan)	0.53.03
77	Jure Logar (Slovenia)	0.53.53
78	Daniel Pombo (Portugal)	0.53.56
79	Peter Novacik (Slovakia)	0.53.58
80	Greg Saharin (South Africa)	0.54.72
81	Mitchell Delfs (Australia)	0.56.94
82	Attila Hutter (Hungary)	1.01.50
83	Albe Barilaro Caparros (Andorra)	1.02.22
84	Matej Charvat (Czech Republic)	1.02.28
85	King Man Tsui (Hong Kong, China)	1.02.77
86	Mike Mihai Moga (Romania)	1.03.81
87	Markus Pekoll (Austria)	1.13.93
88	Sergey Maltsev (Russian Federation)	1.14.74
89	Matej Vitko (Slovakia)	1.15.75
90	Eriklennart Purres (Estonia)	1.21.25
91	Ricard Ferreira Campos (Andorra)	1.21.64
92	Vadim Feklistov (Estonia)	1.35.80
93	Marc Beaumont (Great Britain)	1.36.08
94	Gergely Veres (Hungary)	1.37.66
95	Andrew Neethling (South Africa)	2.06.81
96	Jorg Jaramillo Salazar (Colombia)	3.12.52
97	Adam Vagner (Czech Republic)	4.47.98
98	Ped Ferreira Landskran (Chile)	7.31.22
DNF	Robin Wallner (Sweden)	
DNS	Charlesalexandre Dube (Canada)	
DNS	Markus Olkkonen (Finland)	
DNS	Krisztian Halasz (Hungary)	