

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

Elite men cross country *By Sue George in Val di Sole, Italy*

Sauser, Swiss slam men's cross country

Switzerland dominated the seven-lap men's cross country race, with Chrisoph Sauser claiming the World Championship title and his fellow countrymen Florian Vogel and Ralph Naef taking the second and third spots, for an all-Swiss podium. The 30 year-old Sauser led the race from the very beginning, at first together with Vogel, but he dropped his team-mate by the end of the third lap and went off on his own.

Four-time World Champion Julien Absalon (France) was never a factor at the front of the race. He rode for a time as high as third place before vanishing from the scene and then dropping out of the race.

From the gun, Sauser and Vogel applied full throttle and the field quickly strung out behind them. By the first half-lap, they were at the front with a four second gap on Roel Paulissen (Belgium). Lado Fumic (Germany) led the chase behind and Absalon was spotted back in sixth place.



Christoph Sauser (Switzerland) wins
Photo ©: Rob Jones

"All week I felt strong and confident," said Sauser, who will now has two World Championship jerseys in his wardrobe. He is still the reigning World Marathon Champion ♦ a title he will defend in two weeks.

Fredrik Kessiakoff (Sweden) made a bid to join the leaders near the end of the first lap, and he was successful ♦ the only non-Swiss rider to keep the company of the leaders all day. Behind him, Absalon advanced to fourth place, chasing alone at 12 seconds. His team-mate Jean-Christophe Peraud led the charge from behind, followed shortly by Jose Antonio Hermida (Spain).

On lap two Kessiakoff came off and was trailing Sauser and Vogel by six seconds while Absalon chased in fourth at a distance 35 seconds. Hermida and Peraud worked together one minute behind.

Sauser looked to be the stronger of the leading Swiss pair and spent more time at the front although both leaders were seen trading turns. Kessiakoff dangled like a yo-yo off the leaders, trying to keep contact, but he lost the mental and physical battle and began to slip backwards.

Near the end of the second lap, Sauser rode away from his team-mate, leaving Vogel dangling at nine seconds. Kessiakoff started to crack, slipping back to 55 seconds. Absalon looked to be in rough shape and he continued to lose ground on a possible bronze medal.

Behind the Frenchman, Liam Killeen (Great Britain), Christoph Soukup (Austria) and Jakob Fuglsang (Denmark) worked together.

Sauser rode like a machine, with complete attention to the task at hand ♦ winning the World Championship. He seemed to race effortlessly around the course, never slowing, never looking back, just racing along on his brand new 2009 Specialized Epic, brought out just for the occasion.

"I rode my new bike in February for two days and then this week," said Sauser, who wasn't fazed by racing worlds on a different bike than the one on which he had been training and racing. "I'm used to switching between my bikes."

"It's quite a bit lighter," said Sauser, who claimed 700g difference. "It's like a fighter jet on the climbs and a jumbo jet on the descents."

Sauser said he attacked because he didn't want to risk losing at the end as happened at Fort William two weeks ago and at the European Championships.

For the duration of the race, Vogel would grind on alone. "For me it was really hard," he said. "For the first few laps, I could follow Christoph. Then I realized he was too fast. It was hard. There was lots of pressure from behind. I thought Julien and Ralf were closing and could catch me."

Absalon made it another few laps before apparently calling it a day at around one and half laps to go. Kessiakoff slipped backward while Naef found his late-race form and motored upward to an eventual third place, which he assumed for good with about one lap to go.

"I couldn't start fast because it was so hot. I was just suffering," said Naef. "I didn't have so many races in the last week. It was hot and I just put water over me and went. I think it was good I didn't go over the limit in the heat at the start."

On a day when the heat took its toll, Sauser rode calmly and coolly to victory in 1'58"26. Vogel finished at 2'55" while Naef's late surge saw him third in 4'20".

When asked how the Swiss were racing so fast, Sauser said, "The Olympic selection process made us fast." The Swiss federation will pick three members of its Olympic team after today's race.

Killeen proved his is fully back on form with a break-through day and fourth place finish. Kessiakoff rounded out the top five. "I knew this course suited me, and I felt good Tuesday in the relay. The conditions are completely different today, but in the last month or so, I had some good health."

Killeen, who is Sauser's team-mate for Specialized, but was not racing the new Epic, called the effort like a time trial, with just a bit of tactics due to the wind. "I just rode my own race and tried to make up time, especially in the first two laps as that's where the places are made."

The British racer noted it was the same time of year as his last good race at Mont-Saint-Anne two years ago. "The end of June is usually when I come this good. Today is really good for my confidence."

American Todd Wells finished 15th ♦ the best for his country after a tough start, from which he had to work his way back up. He picked off guys the entire race. "I had a really bad fourth lap and then I recovered and started to go again." Wells and Adam Craig (United States) look likely to make their nation's Olympic team after today's performances. Craig wasn't too happy with his ride today, but called it a long season so far and said he was "ready for a vacation".

Neither was ready to celebrate a trip to Beijing. "You never know until you get the letter," said Wells.

Oli Beckingsale (Great Britain) closed out the top ten, but was disappointed to be slowed by mechanicals. "I was with a top group and then I had a crash. I had problems with my brakes all day which meant I made time on the climbs and lost time on the descents all day."

"You know how it is when you get a mechanical," he said shrugging. "My brakes were fading. On the third lap, I went straight into the bushes, and then I was lying there for a bit."

Race notes:

- Geoff Kabush finished as the fastest Canadian in 16th place. Ok, but not ecstatic with his finish, he said he was getting over a cold and looking forward to returning to North America and getting healthy.
- Mountain bike legend Thomas Frischknecht (Switzerland) completed his final elite world championship cross country race. "It's definitely faster," he said of the pace afterward. "It's too fast for me! If it wasn't my last one, I probably wouldn't have finished because I was going backward after the half way point and having a really hard time." Frischknecht said he was proud of the all-Swiss podium. "Three on the podium exceeds expectations although any one of them being up there is not a surprise."
- Despite what he called "bad form", Chris Jongewaard finished as the top Australian in 29th and was satisfied with his race. "I didn't have good legs today. It was challenging. I blew hard on the first lap and had to back off." Jongewaard will head down under for some time at home.

Results

1	Christoph Sauser (Switzerland)	1.58.26
2	Florian Vogel (Switzerland)	2.55
3	Ralph Naef (Switzerland)	4.20
4	Liam Killeen (Great Britain)	4.43
5	Fredrik Kessiakoff (Sweden)	4.48
6	Christoph Soukup (Austria)	5.08
7	Roel Paulissen (Belgium)	5.40
8	Inaki Lejarreta Errasti (Spain)	6.04
9	Moritz Milatz (Germany)	6.52
10	Oliver Beckingsale (Great Britain)	6.58
11	Jaroslav Kulhavy (Czech Republic)	7.15
12	Rudi Van Houts (Netherlands)	7.27
13	Johann Pallhuber (Italy)	7.53
14	Martin Gujan (Switzerland)	8.05
15	Todd Wells (United States Of America)	8.10
16	Geoff Kabush (Canada)	8.16
17	Marek Galinski (Poland)	8.24
18	Ivan Alvarez Gutierrez (Spain)	8.29
19	Andrea Tiberi (Italy)	8.49
20	Jakob Fuglsang (Denmark)	9.26
21	Ruben Ruzafa Cueto (Spain)	9.39
22	Cedric Ravanel (France)	9.58
23	Lado Fumic (Germany)	10.04
24	Seamus Mcgrath (Canada)	10.18
25	Rubens Donizeti Valeriano (Brazil)	10.33
26	Hector Leonardo Paez Leon (Colombia)	10.52
27	Thomas Frischknecht (Switzerland)	11.35
28	Bas Peters (Netherlands)	11.45
29	Chris Jongewaard (Australia)	12.01
30	Evgeniy Pechenin (Russian Federation)	12.39
31	Paolo Montoya (Costa Rica)	12.42
32	Daniel Mcconnell (Australia)	13.06
33	Sergiy Rysenko (Ukraine)	13.17
34	Jelmer Pietersma (Netherlands)	13.38
35	Edivando De Souza Cruz (Brazil)	14.18
36	Bart Brentjens (Netherlands)	14.28
37	Marco Aurelio Fontana (Italy)	14.29
38	Ji Jianhua (People's Republic of China)	
39	Alban Lakata (Austria)	14.32
40	Jochen Kass (Germany)	14.50
41	Peter Riis Andersen (Denmark)	15.08
42	Filip Meirhaeghe (Belgium)	15.49
43	Yader Zoli (Italy)	16.27
44	Sergio Mantecon Gutierrez (Spain)	16.33
45	Adam Craig (United States Of America)	16.57

One lap behind

46	Andras Parti (Hungary)	
47	Kashi Leuchs (New Zealand)	
48	Frank Schotman (Netherlands)	
49	Jeremy Horgankobelski (United States Of America)	
50	Klaus Nielsen (Denmark)	
51	Mannie Heymans (Namibia)	
52	Kenji Takeya (Japan)	
53	Mirko Pirazzoli (Italy)	
54	Kohei Yamamoto (Japan)	
55	Yury Trofimov (Russian Federation)	
56	Barry Wicks (United States Of America)	
57	Giuseppe Lamastra (Italy)	

58 Wolfram Kurschat (Germany)

Two laps behind

59 Mario Alberto Rojas (Colombia)
60 Jiri Friedl (Czech Republic)
61 Javier Eduardo Puschel (Chile)
62 Niall Davis (Ireland)
63 Milan Barenýi (Slovakia)
64 Julio Humberto Caro Silva (Colombia)
65 Emil Lindgren (Sweden)
66 Karl Platt (Germany)
67 Marc Bassingthwaite (Namibia)
68 Michael Broderick (United States Of America)
69 Robson Da Silva Ferreira (Brazil)
70 Roland Plank (Austria)

Three laps behind

71 Samuel Schultz (United States Of America)
72 Ben Melt Swanepoel (South Africa)
73 Octavio Vicente Chetto (Mexico)
74 Tudor Oprea Ovidiu (Romania)
75 Chun Hing Chan (Hong Kong, China)
76 Igor Bogdan (Ukraine)
77 Kazuhiro Yamamoto (Japan)
78 Bojan Djurdjic (Serbia)
79 Boris Popovic (Serbia)
80 Johan Van Zyl (South Africa)

Four laps behind

81 Matej Lovse (Slovenia)
82 Justice Makhale (South Africa)
83 Robert Kordez (Slovenia)
DNF Julien Absalon (France)
DNF Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos (Spain)
DNF Jeanchristophe Peraud (France)
DNF Manuel Fumic (Germany)
DNF Milan Spesny (Czech Republic)
DNF Lukas Fluckiger (Switzerland)
DNF Jurg Graf (Switzerland)
DNF Carlos Coloma Nicolas (Spain)
DNF Hannes Metzler (Austria)
DNF Sven Nys (Belgium)
DNF Tony Longo (Italy)
DNF Sid Taberlay (Australia)
DNF Derek Zandstra (Canada)
DNF Max Plaxton (Canada)
DNF John Jairo Botero Salazar (Colombia)
DNF Alexey Medvedev (Russian Federation)
DNF Takahiro Ogasawara (Japan)
DNF Luciano Caraccioli (Argentina)
DNF Julian Alfonso Becerra Medina (Colombia)
DNF Marco Pazzini (San Marino)
DNS Karl Markt (Austria)
DNS Marcin Karczynski (Poland)