

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

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

Fullana claims third world title

Spaniard Margarita Fullana claimed her third career World Championship title in the women's cross country, attacking with one and a half laps to go and dropping defending World Champ Irina Kalentieva and German Sabine Spitz. Fullana, who won the title in 1999 and 2000 rode at the front of the five-lap race from the gun, with only Spitz and the Russian Kalentieva able to hold her pace for long. Marie-Helene Premont (Canada) put in a strong second half to take fourth.

Spitz took the initiative from the start and was seen at the front at almost every opportunity during the first few laps. "The climbs are shorter here and require more power," she said. "The course suited me."

Spitz pulled Fullana, Kalentieva, and Blaza Klemencic (Slovenia) off the front with her. "I felt good on the first climb and had a look at how they were doing," she said explaining how she pushed the pace to test her companions. "For me, you have to be in front. The first gap came by the first downhill. Then we slowed down going through the finish on lap one. I wanted to keep the pace up, not let it go down." So she went to the front again.

The German, who won silver last year, was clearly having a good day. "Sometimes you have this feeling that this could be your day and yes, I had that today. I felt I could."

Before the end of the first lap, Klemencic fell off the pace of what became the lead trio. In between her and the leaders, Premont chased alone in fourth while Gunn-Rita Dahle Flesjaa (Norway) rode alone a further 12 seconds back. She was cheered by numerous fans dressed up with Viking helmets, decorated with face paint and wearing "Gunn-Rita" jerseys.

Halfway through the second lap, Kalentieva was seen dropping off the pace of the ever-charging Spitz and Fullana hanging tight in second. The tenacious 2007 World Champion was clearly fighting a mental and physical battle to hang on. She was as far back as 12 seconds, but kept chasing back on to the two leaders.

"It was hard from the start. I felt weak," said Kalentieva, who ultimately would fall off for good with a little less than two laps to go. She rode the rest of her race along, fighting to hold on to a bronze medal.

At the front, Spitz conducted the train until the first major climb after two laps to go. That's when Fullana moved to the front and gapped Spitz. In less than half a lap, she opened up 14 seconds on Spitz and 27 seconds in Kalentieva. Behind them, Majra Wloszczowska (Poland) made a bid and moved into fourth ahead of Premont in fifth and Dahle-Flesjaa in sixth.

With one to go, Fullana came through the finish line spinning effortlessly at a high cadence. She appeared to be a woman on a mission. Spitz was still riding well but appeared to be working harder behind the leader by 48 seconds.

The order would remain the same until the end only the gaps would grow. Fullana crossed the line celebrating in a time of 1'39"01. Spitz followed for silver at 1'43" while Kalentieva secured bronze at 2'20".

"The race was really different than a World Cup," said the new World Champion Fullana. "It was really difficult for me." Under other circumstances the Spaniard might have been celebrating her second consecutive worlds victory; however, she had to sit out last year after she was given an "unfit to race" suspension just 24 hours before the 2007 worlds.

Spitz earned her second silver at the World Championships after her first in Fort William in 2007. "I have to accept that she was stronger than me today, and I have to be satisfied. I tried my best." After a long spring, Spitz is looking forward to a brief holiday at home in the Black Forest of Germany, where she will take a week off her bike.



Margarita Fullana (Spain)
Photo ©: Rob Jones

"I am maybe a little disappointed. I am looking forward to the next World Cup and World Championships. The heat didn't help me today," said third placed Kalentieva, keeping it all in perspective, "I'm happy with third considering how I felt."

On the final lap, Premont made a valiant chase for bronze and closed the gap some on Kalentieva. Her efforts paid off well enough for her to overtake Wloszczowska for fourth. The Pole and Dahle Flesjaa wrapped up fifth and sixth.

"I knew the race would not be long, so I tried to give everything I had at the beginning," said Premont. "I didn't try to save energy for the end because I knew it would be a very short race."

"Oh yeah, I knew how close she was," she said of Wloszczowska, whom she chased. "I knew I had to catch her before that fast last downhill."

"It was hard as always with the World Championships," said Dahle-Flesjaa. "I think most of the cyclists could have felt better...except Fullana...she's used to this," she said referring to the hot weather. "With my shape at the moment, which is not bad, I think I went maybe a little over my limit at the beginning." But she knew starting strong was important to minimize the gaps to close later.

Premont's compatriot Catherine Pendrel put in a sixth place finish to match her performance from last year. "I got off to a slow start and I was worried because I had to dig deep to get into the top 10, but I was able to ease off on the third lap and finish strong. This year was different than last year when I got into the lead group right away and I was trying not to lose places. This time I had to work my way up and was still chasing on and catching girls at the end."

Georgia Gould put in the top American performance with a ninth place at 6'18". "I most just hung in there. I was trying to have a solid race here, and I knew it'd be hot and there'd be tons of steep climbing. I tried to pace myself and made sure I had some left for the end." Gould was cheered on by a full crowd of relatives including several cousins and their families and her dad among others.

Third fastest American was Mary McConneloug in 20th place. McConneloug struggled, especially at the end of the race. "Oh my gosh, I faded hard on the last lap. I woke up with a sore throat yesterday and the heat also played role". The Cyclingnews diarist will head back to the states for a few weeks of racing including the National Championships in mid-July and the next two World Cups in eastern Canada.

With their performances, Gould and McConneloug continue holding their places at the front of the chase for the two US Olympic team spots. An announcement from USA Cycling about the American Olympic team is expected shortly. Both Gould and McConneloug were clearly relieved the battle was over.

"It was a stretch to keep the fitness from the beginning until now," said McConneloug of the spring-long European World Cup campaign.

Lea Davison logged the American surprise of the day. "It was probably the race of my life," she said after finishing 19th. She narrowly missed out on Eva Lechner (Italy) in a sprint finish to the line for 18th.

"I'm dead," she said though still smiling afterward. I felt ok on the first lap and then I focussed on picking girls off and I felt stronger and stronger." Davison said the course was well suited to her with the frequent climbs and technical descents."

"The best part about it is that I was riding behind an Italian woman and the crowds were really cheering, so I felt like they were cheering for me as I was 10 feet behind her."

Results

1	Margarita Fullana (Spain)	1.39.01 (17.66 km/h)
2	Sabine Spitz (Germany)	1.43
3	Irina Kalentieva (Russian Federation)	2.20
4	Mariehelene Premont (Canada)	2.52
5	Maja Wloszczowska (Poland)	3.46
6	Catherine Pendrel (Canada)	4.51
7	Gunnrita Dahle Flesjaa (Norway)	5.16
8	Elisabeth Osl (Austria)	5.29
9	Georgia Gould (United States Of America)	6.18
10	Blaza Klemencic (Slovenia)	6.38
11	Katrin Leumann (Switzerland)	6.49
12	Katerina Nash (Czech Republic)	7.11
13	Lene Byberg (Norway)	7.50
14	Laurence Leboucher (France)	8.46
15	Petra Henzi (Switzerland)	9.04
16	Anna Szafraniec (Poland)	9.29
17	Ying Liu (People's Republic of China)	9.48
18	Eva Lechner (Italy)	10.02
19	Lea Davison (United States Of America)	10.03
20	Mary Mc Conneloug (United States Of America)	10.27
21	Marielle Sanerguinhard (Switzerland)	11.09
22	Esther SUss (Switzerland)	11.47
23	Helene Marcouyre (France)	11.49
24	Magdalena Sadlecka (Poland)	11.55
25	Adelheid Morath (Germany)	12.09
26	Anna Villar Argente (Spain)	
27	Elena Gaddoni (Italy)	12.48
28	Francisca Campos Salas (Chile)	13.05
29	Heather Irmiger (United States Of America)	13.17
30	Rosara Joseph (New Zealand)	13.45
31	Jingjing Wang (People's Republic of China)	13.59
32	Laura Turpijn (Netherlands)	14.10
33	Maroussia Rusca (Switzerland)	14.18
34	Sabrina Enaux (France)	
35	Kiara Bisaro (Canada)	15.19
36	Cecile Rode Ravanel (France)	15.46
37	Dellys Starr (Australia)	16.56
38	Rocio Gamonal Ferrera (Spain)	17.34
39	Rie Katayama (Japan)	18.34
40	Willow Koerber (United States Of America)	18.43
41	Yolande Speedy (South Africa)	19.01
42	Anna Ferrari (Italy)	19.03

One lap behind

43	Pavla Havlikova (Czech Republic)
44	Oxana Rybakova (Russian Federation)
45	Sylwia Kapusta (Poland)
46	Janka Stevkova (Slovakia)
47	Kelli Emmett (United States Of America)
48	Mitsumi Yazawa (Japan)
49	Claudia Seidel (Germany)
50	Erika Gramiscelli (Brazil)
51	Viviana Andrea Maya (Colombia)
52	Sara Muhl (South Africa)
53	Inbar Ronen (Israel)
54	Fiona Macdermid (Great Britain)
55	Daniella Bunzli Rojas (Chile)

Two laps behind

56	Maria Osl (Austria)
57	Barbara Oberdorfer (Italy)
58	Kaytee Boyd (New Zealand)

Three laps behind

59 Senem Guler (Turkey)

DNF Nina Homovec (Slovenia)

DNS Evelyn Staffler (Italy)

DNS Alexandra Hober (Italy)