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STAGE 3 - VILLIERSDORP TO GREYTON

SONGO.INFO ON A WINNING STREAK

The 73km long route of the third stage of the Absa Cape Epic presented by adidas took riders from Villiersdorp to Greyton, with 1 976m of climbing passed Kaaimansgat, through some single track, 3-kilometre stretch of portage, eventually leading to the top of Boskloof, and then down towards the tranquil town of Greyton.

The Songo.info team of South African Burry Stander and Swiss rider Christoph Sauser continued their winning streak by again taking top honours in Stage 3 of this year's Absa Cape Epic presented by adidas (03:19:38). Their fourth consecutive win gives them an overall time advantage of 6 minutes and 52 seconds (12:44:36). They will again wear the Yellow Jersey out of Greyton for Stage 4.

Team Songo.info was closely followed by the Swiss Flückiger brothers, Lukas and Mathias (Trek World Cup Team), who managed to move up two positions from 11th to 9th overall (13:48:01) after completing their challenge at 03:19:50. Bart Brentjens and Chris Jongewaard (Trek-Brentjens) finished in third place (03:19:57), closely followed by the Bulls, Karl Platt and Stefan Sahn, in a time of 03:20:05.

Karl Platt and Stefan Sahn (Bulls Team) held on to their 2nd position overall (12:51:28) with Trek-Brentjens riders, Bart Brentjens and Chris Jongewaard, maintaining their third (12:55:57). The South African team Kevin Evans and David George (MTN Energade) finished in seventh position today in 03:28:37, but managed to maintain their fourth position overall (13:05:02). Yesterday's second runners-up Emil Lindgren and Andreas Kugler (Felt Factory 2) finished in 6th place today (03:28:35) and are now in 5th place overall (13:10:54).

For the first time since the start of the race the Swiss Flückiger brothers managed to break away and take the lead for parts of Stage 3. Says Mathias Flückiger: "The Absa Cape Epic didn't start so well for us – we had a bit of bad luck the first couple of days, especially with punctured tyres. We had one again today, just after we broke away from the rest of the riders – a ripped tyre which took longer to repair and cost us a bit of time. It took a lot of our energy to catch up again and we were really riding at our limit on the first big climb. The following flat section gave us the opportunity to recover a bit and we could keep up with the three leading teams – the Bulls, Trek- Brentjens and Songo.info."

Adds Lukas Flückiger: "It's been our goal to attack and ride hard, and we knew today's stage suited our style very well. It was a shorter distance so we could ride faster. Mathias broke away on the first big climb and I followed. Initially we thought Bart was ahead of us as we couldn't see him, only to realise later that he

was behind us after having taken a wrong turn. When we broke away the second time, we rode a long stretch of about 6km on our own – ahead of the other teams. It made it easier for the teams behind us as they were working together. By the time Songo.info attacked, we didn't have the energy to keep up with them."

Adds Mathias: "We were really desperate to win the stage today and although we went through all the emotional highs and lows typical of such a stage race, we're thrilled with our second place. We feel we've broken the run of bad luck we had the first couple of days. And hope that we can ride according to our abilities from now."

Brentjens and his team mate Chris Jongewaard took a wrong turn early on in the race after they had built up a lead of about 1 minute. Says Brentjens: "We were blinded by the sun and missed the route markers. Luckily we were saved by the TV helicopter crew – they indicated from the air that we had taken a wrong turn and needed to turn back. We had a good day and it was nice to make it to the podium. Chris is improving daily and now we know we have a chance to make it to the second place. I really enjoy the fact that Chris never gives up. He's an aggressive rider and whenever there's the slightest chance to break away, he goes for it." Adds Jongewaard: "Bart and I have comparable riding patterns to the Bulls team. Bart and Karl have similar strengths, and so do Stefan and I. We're equally matched teams and therefore both stand the chance of finishing in second place."

According to Stander, today's shorter route was harder than yesterday's. "Bart and his team mate Chris (Trek-Brentjens) were really pushing the pedals all the time. The very first climb today was already hard for me. There was a lot of loose gravel and we had to walk in quite a few places along the route. These hiking sections with your bike on your back were always followed by very fast descents and you really had to stay focused. I found it exhausting as you need energy to control your bike. We also had another flat and then needed to catch up with the leaders again."

Both Sauser and Stander are very good climbers and the ascents in today's stage were the decisive factor to winning. On these sections the stronger climbers can ride hard and do not wear themselves out as much. They can then conserve energy by teaming up on the flat stretches of the route.

Says Sauser: "You don't really know the route beforehand. On the steep climbs, Burry and I would just look at each other; see whether we're both feeling good, and then attack. We were pushing ahead and close to the end, we could see Karl and the rest of the riders couldn't follow and keep up with us. Dr Evil (route designer Leon Evans' nickname) plans good Cross-Country routes and I'm really enjoying this year's Epic. But, the race is only over once you cross the finish line

at Lourensford Wine Estate. Obviously we're more confident that we can make it and we're going to go for it."

Adds Stander: "The overall victory of the Absa Cape Epic would mean a lot to me. Many South African riders focus on this race as their primary goal. Winning this race would prove that I'm a complete mountain biker and not only good at short, intense Cross-Country races."

On working so well together as a team, Sauser comments that Stander takes the lead in the early mornings. "He works really hard then, and as soon as the sun's up and I'm warmed-up, I take over. We complement each other very well and are the perfect match. Also, one mustn't forget that we have a fantastic Songo.info support team. They're a bunch of good people who are really committed and make life off the bike as easy as possible for us. Burry enjoys fixing his bike and often works on it till quite late. We have loads of fun and really good team vibes."

According to Kevin Evans of the MTN Energade team, both he and his partner David George had punctures today. "David was able to seal his puncture, but my tyre was cut badly, so I had to ride on my flat tyre to a neutral tech zone at the one water point to get spares. It was just a bad day for us – and that's mountain biking." This cost the MTN Energade team 9 minutes of their overall time.

ABSA LADIES HAVE THE "LAWS" ON THEIR SIDE

Absa ladies Hanlie Booyens and Sharon Laws finished in first place for the fourth day in a row (04:35:28), and remain in the overall lead (17:21:45) in their category. They were again followed by Robyn Adendorff and Sarah van Heerden (WSP – Jeep Girls) in a time of 05:18:52, placing them second overall as well (20:12:04). The Tread Magazine Ladies, Nolene Saunders and Sarah Wielopolska, secured their second first podium finish in a time of 05:29:57, placing them in third position for this stage and overall (20:38:22).

ADIDAS BIG TREE TEAM LIKES TO BE DRESSED IN GREEN

Hanging on to their overall lead (14:38:09) and their green leader jerseys, Nico Pfitzenmaier and Alison Sydor (Adidas Big Tree) again won the Mixed category in a time of 03:54:30 for the fourth day in a row. They were followed by Marcel Bartholet and Esther Süss (Wheeler – IXS Pro) in a time of 04:01:12 (second overall – 15:17:21) with Paul Cordes and Yolande Speedy (IMC/ Momentum GT/ Activeworx) in third place (04:10:21). They are also placed third overall (15:33:12).

Esther Süss, of team Wheeler – IXS Pro says: "This is my very first Absa Cape Epic. I was prepared that the race would be tough, but now I know it really *is* tough. The Mixed category very much depends on the kind of man you're riding with. This is the very first year that Marcel and I are racing for the same mountain bike team. We spent the first stage trying to figure out how much I can ask him for support without wearing him out. It's also Marcel's first stage race, so it's

really trial and error for us. We're only now getting to know each other and therefore our confidence is building.

"I also only knew Ivonne and Alison prior to the start of the race and didn't know what to expect from the strong South African teams. We've realised now that we have a good chance of a podium finish. We're also hoping for a day when we're both feeling really strong so that we could perhaps manage a stage win, although Alison and Nico are a really strong team. I'm so pleased that I entered in the Mixed category. Riding with a man is challenging as you really need to keep up. I enjoy it and it definitely improves my performance."

Paul Cordes and Yolande Speedy were the winners of the Mixed category in the 2007 edition of the Absa Cape Epic, Says Speedy: "Having raced together before makes a big difference as we know each other's weaknesses and strengths. We know when to push and when to shut up. When you're full of adrenaline or anxiety, you may sometimes say something wrong and regret it later. We knew Alison and Nico would be strong – they're actually riding in a different league. We're more evenly matched with the second team and hope to race them in the next few days." Adds team mate, Paul Cordes: "We did the Absa Cape Epic in 2007 and had a year's break. For me it's quite a challenge as I find it difficult to adjust to the new route. It's very different riding from point A to point B (Knysna to Lourensford), than in circles. Initially our goal was a podium finish, but actually I think our main goal is to finish and still talk to each other. I'd rather keep a good friendship than win."

Pfitzenmaier and Sydor have moved from 14th to 17th place overall and are leading their category by 39 minutes and 12 seconds.

TAKING PART IN THE ABSA CAPE EPIC FOR A VERY WORTHY CAUSE

Despite crossing the finish line first today, the Absa Masters Doug Brown and Barti Bucher received a 2 minute "time adjustment" by the UCI Commissaires due to cutting short on the route. They mistakenly missed a turn following children waving and cheering them on. The Absa Masters finished in a time of 03:47:00 and are still the overall leaders in this category (14:19:43). Shan Wilson and Andrew Mclean (Cycle Lab Toyota) therefore finished in first place (03:46:05) on the podium, and remain second overall (14:45:13). In third place were Corrie Muller and Robert Sim (Van Loveren/ SAND) in 04:08:13 (overall time 16:04:20).

Third placed Masters team Van Loveren / SAND of Corrie Muller and Robert Sim, who is taking part for a very worthy and personal reason this year. 44-year-old Muller has taken part in every Absa Cape Epic since the inaugural event in 2004, but bad news prevented him from participating last year. "My son Richard, who was labelled as 'Jan Lastig' by many of the Epic crew as he was always playing with the chords and wires, was diagnosed with leukaemia in October of 2007 when he was only three years old. It was the ultimate test for us as a family

during the time that he was battling with his illness for more than a year,” he says.

Thankfully, young Richard recovered, whereafter the family’s agony was converted into absolute gratitude. “We are so fortunate - we live twenty minutes away from the hospital, have our own transport and can take care of our little boy. Other children in rural areas don’t necessarily have this luxury to arrive for medical care within time when they need it most.”

It was while sitting at the hospital during one of the many visits that he noticed another six year old boy, Nico Smit, who was suffering from the same condition as his own son. “Unfortunately, Nico comes from a family of alcoholics and abuse. They are not able to take care of him, and when he is released from the hospital, he won’t be able to be placed in his own family’s care as they aren’t able to look after him.”

Moved by the experience, Muller has established a trust called ‘beitel’ after the title of N.P van Wyk Louw’s famous poem, which will benefit young Nico Smit and other children like him. “Even if we are just able to get him a proper medical aid, send him to a good school, and making sure he gets the medical treatments he requires, then it will all be worth it.”

The team, who is sponsored by property developers SAND and Van Loveren wines, are getting additional money for the trust from people who have pledged to sponsor every kilometre that the team completes during this year’s event. “Some have committed to double their pledge should we complete a stage with a podium finish,” Muller says.

He says that this year will be his last Absa Cape Epic: “It takes pain to realise how grateful we all should be for what we’ve got. I have two other sons as well, aged thirteen and fifteen, and I’m rather going to do a trip down the Orange River with them next year to spend more time with them. At least my final year as part of the Absa Cape Epic adventure seekers is definitely one of the best ever – it doesn’t get tougher than what this year’s route requires.”

Commenting on their performance this year, Muller says that they are delighted with their third overall ranking after Stage 3. Their strategy for the remainder of the race is to hold on to this position. “We’ll do this on a conservative basis by just completing each stage at the best of our abilities. If we’re proud of what we’ve accomplished after each day, we would have accomplished what we set out to do.”

For more information, visit <<http://www.beitel.co.za>>www.beitel.co.za.

BLISTERS END MARK FISH’S EPIC AMBITIONS

Right before the top of the major climb of today's Stage, Mark Fish was taken out of the race by the official Absa Cape Epic medical team due to severe blisters on his feet and cuts on his heels. By the time the doctors arrived, Fish was already walking on his socks as he could not bear the pain of wearing shoes anymore. Fish says that he was experiencing skin irritation since Stage 1, and now regrets that he didn't pay more attention to the warning signals.

"The shoes I'm wearing are fairly new, and I haven't spent a lot of time cycling with them, let alone walking. Today we were hiking for over an hour, and I was fighting the challenge mostly by walking on my socks." He adds: "I'm so disappointed! When I start something, I want to finish it. I have to accept and I do understand that health comes first. I'll be back next year, and then I'll be more prepared." Fish says that despite no longer taking part in the actual event, he will stay on for the duration of this year's event after the organisers encouraged him to participate with the daily soccer and running school tournaments, and help support the development sports programmes that the Absa Cape Epic endorses.

ABSA CAPE EPIC ATTRACTS CHAMPION ATHLETES OF ALL SORTS TO MOUNTAIN BIKING

South African marathon champion, Robert de la Motte, runner-up at the Comrades in 1984, 1986 and 1987, winner of the 1985 City-to-City in Johannesburg, and 1986 Korkie (forerunner of the annual Two Oceans), is competing in his first Absa Cape Epic this year. Robert, who has since moved to Australia, completed the inaugural Ironman Australia in 2004.

After that, Robert enjoyed road cycling and joined a training group. During October 2008, De La Motte and his Absa Cape Epic partner, Ian Sandover, borrowed mountain bikes to participate in a new race called Cape to Cape, which was 130km long. At this race, they met four guys from South Africa who had all completed the Absa Cape Epic before and couldn't stop raving about it. "It sounded like a once in a lifetime experience, so we decided to do it!" At that stage, the 2009 event was already sold out, but luckily De la Motte got an entry through the JAG Foundation thanks to his professional athlete background, for which he was most grateful. After his entry was confirmed in December, he started his training, which he refers to as "a mountain bike crash course". Commenting on his first Absa Cape Epic, he says: "I'm not very good in the technical sections.

The night before the Prologue I had a nightmare that we wouldn't make the two and a half hour cut-off, but thank goodness we completed it in one hour and fifteen minutes. However, instead of arriving late, I burst my brand new chain. This race is very, very tough. I'm struggling with the heat. Stage 1 was just terrible, I struggled so much and was so dehydrated that they put me on a drip. Stage 2 was better, but I also ended up riding into the same ditch that Tim Boehme must have fallen into, and went flying over my handlebars. Fortunately, both my bike and I were still in fine shape and we could continue," he says. For

Stage 3 today, De La Motte enjoyed the route, not minding the running and walking involved, which is naturally “one of my strengths”.

Today’s portage sections also called for some creativity as a few riders arrived ‘prepared’ with a pair of hiking shoes attached to their backpack or a funny expander set-up to strap their bikes to their packs.

ABSA CAPE EPIC SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES ALONG THE ROUTE

3 landowners of the Klein Swartberg Conservancy, which is a vital part of the Greyton route, went out of their way to ensure the safety of our riders by moving cattle and preparing the route in order for participants to traverse. As a thank you, the Absa Cape Epic has made a donation to the conservancy that will go towards alien plant eradication and paying the workers who will be taking care of this project. As a thank you, a huge billboard has been erected to thank the Absa Cape Epic for this valuable contribution.

STAGE 4: 114 KM AND 2 202 METERS OF CLIMBING

Tomorrow’s **Stage 4** (114km and 2 202m of climbing) begins on the open roads with a steady climb followed by a tricky section on fast rocky tracks, testing the reactions early in the morning. After crossing the causeway, a winding trip up and over the hills along farm roads and jeep tracks will take the field back towards Greyton. The last 15km sees a few more sections that test the riders’ technical skills on the climbs as well as the descents. Most of the terrain makes for good riding but with some 20% slopes, the heart may be willing but the legs will scream blue murder. This devastating series of hills will deliver a knockout combination to those lacking in base conditioning. A small reward comes at the end though, some single track then a walk across the riverbed just outside town. Visit www.cape-epic.com for more details and to see where the riders are online during the race.

RESULTS

Check out the current leader board at www.cape-epic.com/live/

For a detailed results list go to www.cape-epic.com/live/results.php