



World Wide Sport Agency  
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## **Rucker Celebrates National Day as Crocodile Trophy Turns Savage**

**Austrian Stefan Rucker celebrated his country's national day in the grandest possible fashion today with a hard-earned victory in stage four of the Crocodile Trophy.**

**In scenes which mirrored the same stage in 2006, Rucker was forced to come from behind, after giving up time to his rivals on the technically demanding railway cutting road between Mount Garnett and Chillagoe.**

**"It felt like de ja vu today, it's great to win on Austria's national day," an ecstatic Rucker said at stage end.**

**"It wasn't easy today, because everyone knew I wanted to win.**

**"I asked for the Austrian flag this morning and placed it in my pocket."**

**The flag was waved proudly as Rucker crossed the finish line with race leader Mauro Bettin close behind at the end of a punishing 140 kilometre stage.**

**Bettin and Rucker broke away at the fifteen kilometres to go mark, from a group which included Benoit Joachim, Michael Borup, Allan Carlsen, Valentin Zeller and Ondrej Fojtik.**

**"I knew I was the stronger rider today," Rucker said.**

**"I attacked and Mauro came with me, but he was asking me to slow down as he was having trouble keeping up."**

### **How it Unfolded**

**Stage four of the Crocodile Trophy rolled out from beautiful Gunnawarra lagoon, where riders had spent the night relaxing by the campfire.**

**But the festivity was long forgotten when the Flight Centre team launched the first attack of the day, sending rookie Ryan**

**Hawson up the road on the opening thirty kilometre, mostly asphalt section, in a move designed to benefit his team leader Tim Bennett.**

**The shot of bravado from the Australians was short-lived, with the serious contenders in the Crocodile Trophy in no mood to have the terms dictated to them.**

**An unusually large bunch of sixteen riders managed to hang on as the leaders hit the railway cutting near Mount Garnett. From there it was a race of attrition as, one by one, those riding above their limit, were forced out the back door.**

**Among them, South Australian Brett Anderson, the 19 year old rookie on the Felt Dream Team, who has learnt much during the Crocodile Trophy.**

**"It was a lot tougher than I thought it would be," Anderson said.**

**"We hit very sandy rocky and fast fire road and that spilt the group up.**

**The young Australian, quickly realising what it will take to become a serious player in the Crocodile Trophy.**

**"The leaders got away, they have phenomenal power in their legs going through the sandy sections," Anderson said.**

**"For guys like me, it's hard to keep up."**

**By the time the leaders reached the end of the technical section, the front group was down to four, with Bettin, Fojtik, Carlsen and Borup driving hard.**

**Stefan Rucker, who had managed to keep the leaders in his sights through the sandy terrain, fought hard to bridge across to the lead group, with help from the Dream Team's Benoit Joachim.**

**There was drama to follow when several of the riders missed their final water stop.**

**Aware of the suffering, Rucker launched an attack which no-one other than Bettin could match, on his way to victory.**

**Today's second-placed result gives Bettin a lead of close to twenty minutes in the General Classification on a day when his rivals for the overall prize took a battering.**

**Second placed Czech Ondrej Fojtik gave up close to seven minutes on the G.C. today, thanks to three broken spokes in his rear wheel, which rendered it almost unrideable.**

**“It is not a good day today, I lose a lot of time,” Fojtik said as he assessed the damage to his bike, inflicted along the punishing railway cutting.**

**Dane Michael Borup also lost another three minutes to Bettin after crashing heavily with seven kilometres to go in today’s stage, in the process destroying his bike.**

**“It was a very hard stage once again today, Allan (Carlsen) and I were pushing really hard (along the railway cutting) and I think we dropped most of the group,” Borup said.**

**“Unfortunately I crashed and hurt my shoulder and my hand and my knee and broke my bike.”**

**The tales of grief didn’t end there, with Australia’s highest ranked rider, Tim Bennett (Flight Centre) also dropping further behind in the overall standings after suffering a flat tyre at the fifty kilometre mark.**

**Bennett’s position could have been much worse, but for the all out effort from Flight Centre team-mate Nick Both, who sacrificed himself to limit the time gap.**

**“Yeah he was looking pretty good up in the front group and pretty comfortable and then he (Bennett) suffered a flat,” Both said.**

**“We did everything we could to get up there but we were just losing time and losing time.**

**“I did everything I could for him and just went to pieces.”**

**Austrian Gerald Bauer also but the dust along the technically demanding railway cutting, a forty kilometre-plus section of trail, littered with sand patches and sharp rocks.**

**“The problem was the corrugations,” Bauer said.**

**“It’s harder than yesterday.**

**“I also had a crash when another competitor stopped in the sand and then I crashed behind him , fell down and hurt my knee and my legs and my arms.**

The protagonists in the Crocodile Trophy of 2007 are facing another demanding day tomorrow, with a potentially mind-numbing 140 kilometre out and back stage to Chillagoe.

Blistering hot conditions are expected once again, and a meeting tonight between race organisers and riders will discuss the possibility of shortening the stage.

While it appears to be the Europeans who are suffering most from the heat, even the Australians found today's conditions trying.

Greg Featonby, a veteran of six Herald Sun Tours, described the Trophy as a race like nothing he has ever done in the "pampered" world of road racing.

Featonby's entry into the Crocodile Trophy came by way of a fiftieth birthday present from his wife.

"I hope she doesn't give me this one for my sixtieth," Featonby quipped as he considered the stages ahead.

### **Herremans Still Fighting**

As tough as today's stage was, any rider considering complaining, should look first to the efforts of Belgian ironman Marc Herremans.

Against all odds, the hand cyclist is continuing to crank his machine towards the final destination in Cape Tribulation.

Herremans survived the power-line track yesterday and completed today's stage in a time of 9.51.14.

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## 2007 Stage Plan (Updated)

<b>Mareeba - Irvinebank</b>	<b>80km</b>	<b>23/10</b>
<b>Irvinebank - Koombooloomba</b>	<b>107km</b>	<b>24/10</b>
<b>Koombooloomba - Gunnawarra</b>	<b>122km</b>	<b>25/10</b>
<b>Gunnawarra - Chillagoe</b>	<b>140km</b>	<b>26/10</b>
<b>Chillagoe - Chillagoe</b>	<b>140km</b>	<b>27/10</b>
<b>Chillagoe - Mount Mulgrave</b>	<b>120km</b>	<b>28/10</b>
<b>Mount Mulgrave - Laura</b>	<b>148km</b>	<b>29/10</b>
<b>Laura - Cooktown</b>	<b>142km</b>	<b>30/10</b>
<b>Cooktown - Daintree</b>	<b>106km</b>	<b>31/10</b>
<b>Daintree - Cape Tribulation</b>	<b>32km</b>	<b>01/11</b>

