

Back To Back Stage Wins For Joachim as Rucker Loses Valuable Time on G.C. By John Michael Flynn at Mount Mulgrave Station

Luxembourger Benoit Joachim scored his second consecutive stage win today in blistering hot conditions as the Crocodile Trophy reached its traditional stop-over at outback Mount Mulgrave Station.

It was another impressive effort from the Astana cyclist, who is competing in The Trophy as a member of the Felt Dream Team. Joachim launched an attack with 20 kilometres to go, a move which played into the hands of his team-mate and race leader Mauro Bettin, who was able to sit comfortably in the bunch and leave the chase to his rivals.

Joachim, an accomplished time trialist, was ultimately too strong over the long flat roads heading into Mount Mulgrave Station. Churning out the wattage when it was needed, the Luxembourger took two minutes out of the main bunch and crossed the Mitchell River with victory in his keeping.

The back-to-back stage wins wiped away the misery of Joachim's start to the Crocodile Trophy, which has proven a baptism of fire, even for such an experienced road professional.

"Well I came here to see what was going on," Joachim said.,

"The first day was bad, the second day I had a problem with my chain, the third I had two flats, but that's Crocodile Trophy.

"Everyboy told me it was going to be hell and it was going to be hard, it is hard and hell but I like it."

Joachim's victory today, the fourth for the Felt Dream Team in this year's Crocodile Trophy, also took the pressure off team leader Mauro Bettin, who maintained a lead of twenty minutes over his nearest rival in the General Classification, Czech Ondrej Fojtik.

"Our leader Mauro, I think he has twenty minutes gap on second, but a lot can happen in the next days," Joachim said.

Arriving in Mount Mulgrave, Dream Team director Christi Valentine was preparing to celebrate like she never has before, in a place where the green machine has scored on more than one occasion. An overall win for Mauro Bettin, now seems the most likely result in the Outback Classic.

"Finally we've worked out all the bugs and the team is performing as a professional unit," Valentine said.

"I am so pleased with our results, our morale and our general conduct that I have no more expectations than to keep going as we're going.

"I couldn't be happier."

Rucker Loses Nine Minutes

Contrasting the scenes of celebration in the Felt Dream Team camp, Austrian Stefan Rucker (Elk Haus) was left to consider what might have been once again, after a flat tyre cost him more than nine minutes during today's stage.

All up, the margin between the third placed rider and race leader Mauro Bettin is close to 30 minutes. It's a margin that will be almost impossible to recover.

A road professional, used to the benefits of mechanical assistance, Rucker used up valuable time reading the instructions on a can of tyre foam, borrowed from his good friend, Australian Struan Lamont.

"It happens, it's disappointing," Rucker said.

"I would really like to win in Cooktown, so I will try for a stage win there."

How It Unfolded

The Crocodile Trophy peloton rolled out from the remote town of Chillagoe on a long flat stage of one hundred and twenty kilometres, finishing at the cattle station of Mount Mulgrave.

As the race headed further north into the tropics, the mercury continued to rise, with the air temperature exceeding forty degrees as the road fried beneath the riders.

The first move of note came from Belgian Roberto Haegdens, who launched a doomed solo attack as the protagonists traced through the cavernous limestone rock formations north of Chillagoe, that are home to numerous Aboriginal rock paintings.

It was a day when the contenders in the Crocodile Trophy of 2007 marked each other closely, conscious of the fact another three punishing stages lie ahead. As the speed continued to surge and slow, many of the amateurs attempting to keep pace with the professionals were left behind.

Rucker's flat tyre occurred in the opening twenty kilometres and the Austrian, until now a serious contender in the Crocodile Trophy, was too far behind the bunch to catch up. He was forced to ride alone to the finish, considering along the way another Crocodile Trophy campaign that might have been.

In the lead group, the attacks kept coming. Czech Radek Sibl attempted to launch himself from behind the race media vehicle, in a move which attracted strong criticism from his rivals.

When Joachim broke away at the twenty kilometre mark, there was no point in Mauro Bettin's rivals for the General classification giving chase. The G.C. group, containing thirteen riders, rolled into the finish together and what followed was a moment of chaos as the bunch turned a corner into the finishing chute.

Austrian Gerry Bauer took advantage of being the first rider to turn the corner, as many of his rivals crashed out on the rocky section of the Mitchell River bed, which hosted the race finish.

"It was o'k today, I had no crash," Bauer said, recounting his disasters of the previous two days.

"It was hot and hotter, really a hard stage, only 800 altitude metres and 120k's but the sun was so hot."

Blistering Hot

The extremity of the weather conditions was best evidenced by Italian mother of three Sandra Klomp, one of five women competing in the Crocodile Trophy.

Klomp reached the finish line with the skin on her arms blistering, an inevitable result of day after day spent in the tropical sun.

"I'm worried only about the heat, my muscles are o'k, I'm riding ok, but its really too hot for me," Klomp admitted.

"My skin is blistering, it doesn't hurt but I'm worried about it.

"I'm going to get the doctor to look at it."

Klomp is presently placed second in the women's general classification, one hour behind fellow Italian Michela Benzoni, who has the race all but wrapped up.

Tough Days for Aussie Battlers

The Port Macquarie based Gordon Street Cycles team from Australia continues to plough on at the Crocodile Trophy of 2007, but for one its riders, Lloyd Newell, today brought something of a flat patch.

After enjoying every minute of yesterday's fifth stage through the outback dust, today the reality of relentless long flat sections in the great race started to hit home.

"It was the hardest day for me, really hard, I think I used a bit too much yesterday, just couldn't get here today quick enough, the head just went," Newell said.

"I spent a lot of time on my own and you know the head sort of goes."

Team-mate Dennis Van Mill likened today's stage to a "Graften to Inverell on Dirt", a reference to Australia's famous one day race, which is staged near his New South Wales home.

"But you don't know what's coming up with the sand and the corrugations.

"I struggled a bit towards the end, but still got there.

"I didn't come here to pull out, I'm looking forward to Cape Tribulation."

What lies ahead tomorrow is a the Trophy's most brutal stage as the race ventures into the spiritual Quinkan Country of Laura. The one hundred and fifty kilometre parcours is littered with corrugations and pot-holes, but no-one who has reached Mount Mulgrave, including Belgium's great inspiration Marc Herremans, is entertaining the thought of pulling out.

Typical of the spirit to continue was today's performance from Australian Peter Dalziel.

Just last night Dalziel couldn't hold down food after being struck with heat exposure.

Somehow he reached today's finish line and vowed to fight on towards Laura, despite the knowledge that tomorrow is likely to be hotter still.

The Crocodile Trophy continues ...

