



International Crocodile Trophy 2011

Stage 3, 20 Oktober 2011

Mount Misery Road and a river crossing make the difference

On the steep uphill to Irvinebank Swiss marathon champion Urs Huber showed again that nobody can beat him on the longer climbs, however, the difference between him and Dutch rider Jeroen Boelen was only 6 seconds. Huber lost precious time not daring to cross a deep river on the bike. At the 17th Crocodile Trophy all cards are still on the table...

Worldwide the race is known as “the world’s longest and hardest mountain bike adventure for professionals and amateurs” and it was adventurous spirit and improvisational skills that prevailed at Koombooloomba Dam. On the eve of the stage, in the flooded race camp, the organizers decided not to race to Gunnawara but to Irvinebank, to spare racers from a gruelling stage along the Powerline Track after a sleepless night in leaking tents for a lot of competitors. The race that was on the (new) menu was nice: 36 km of easy off-road trails followed by 22 km asphalt and 38 km of real mountain biking on undulating terrain. The final section of the stage did reward riders for the past two wet days and a freezing night with fast and sweeping descents. It had stopped raining, the sun tried hard to come out and the trails were grippy. However, the sign at the final turn off to Irvinebank - “Mount Misery Road” - short and steep pinches kept challenging the riders’ endurance on the final kilometres into the small mining town.

“What am I doing here? I wished that I was anywhere but out there on those last 10 km”, said Australian rider Brad Davies. “So hard, but such a nice ride!” Davies was the big surprise of the day. The 41 year old Melbourne based rider was the only Master, even Master 2, rider in the elite front group that powered to the finish. That group was formed immediately after a breakneck speedy start. Besides Davies, there were Urs Huber, Jeroen Boelen, Wolfgang Krenn and Mike Mulken, the top 4 of the GC, as well as Josef Benedseder, Christoff Sokoll, Kevin Hulsmans and Chang Min Park. The three Australians Mark Griffin, Justin Morris and Ashley Hayat were only able to keep up with those nine riders for six km, then it was over and out for them. Missing in the front group: Korean Geeni Yong Choi who punctured his front tire on the first km already – and his bad luck continued as he rolled across the finish line with another flat rear tire. Closely in pursuit of the Koran was another unlucky fellow - Dutch rider Huub Duijn had misunderstood announcements at the rider briefing and thought there would be a neutralized start. That wasn’t the case and he missed his spot in the lead group.

The nine riders in that lead group worked together well, knowing nobody would try to brake away before that terrible Mount Misery Road. Also, the “veteran” in the group, Davies did his part of the job. “Honestly, contrary to many others, I had a good night’s sleep, even better than the night before when I had a lot of water puddles in my tent. I share the tent with Jessica Douglas who leads the women category. We both slept very well”, continued Davies who was 5th last year at the elite 24H mountain bike solo world championships in Canberra.

With 25 km to go, Huber and Boelen thought it was time to accelerate. They did it smoothly, but firmly. No surprise attack, just accelerating very strongly. The first one they left behind was Park, then Sokoll fell back, followed by Davies (who had a flat tire) and finally Hulsmans had to let the others go. A bit further also Krenn and Mulkens couldn't keep up anymore. Only Josef Benedseder from Austria was able to follow Boelen and Huber. The race was on As the road continued to go uphill, Huber attacked again. It was time to get rid of Boelen. Huber succeeded. First the Austrian rider exploded, then Boelen too. From now on it would only be a question of staying safely on the bike to win the stage.

"Uphill I saw Urs Huber constantly some 300 meter in front of me, which is quite a lot when you climb, on the downhill sections he disappeared out of sight", commented Boelen. The last 5 km were technically challenging. Three times I nearly crashed on that descent. That was the point where I decided not to take any risks any more, but suddenly I saw Huber walking through a deep river crossing. I took all risks and rode through the river, putting my weight to the back and hoping not to crash. I succeeded to cross the river on the bike. Suddenly only 50 meters separated me from Huber. Unfortunately we were already too close to the finish for me to take advantage of it."

Huber won his second consecutive stage and increases his lead in the GC with 6 seconds.

"When you ride in the front, those river crossings are hard to take.", explained Huber. You have no idea how deep the water is or how rideable or walkable the surface is. I didn't dare to take a risk. The most important thing for me was to keep this nice leader's jersey."

Tomorrow's stage will take riders on an 84 km race with start and finish at Irvinebank. Huber again will start in the red Crocodile Trophy leader's jersey with Jeroen Boelen following in the white jersey of the points classification.

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