



International Crocodile Trophy 2011

Stage 5, 22 October 2011

Jeroen Boelen Epic

Steep uphill and frightening downhills - that was on the menu for the first 40 km of the 5th stage at this year's Crocodile Trophy. It was those 40 km that made the difference as on the one hand a lot of riders didn't dare to take risks and on the other hand, a lot of riders suffered punctured tires. As always the good riders didn't have any bad luck. Urs Huber and Jeroen Boelen were in a whole different league today and sprinted towards the victory right from the beginning. Boelen took his second consecutive stage win in Mt Mulligan.

"Woaw", exclaimed Boelen at the finish line. "This is real mountain biking! This is like the South African Cape Epic where I was 7th earlier this year." Boelen is participating for the first time in Queensland and every day is in awe of the spectacular scenery (while he rides through the hole of Pluto – or "Woop Woop", as the Aussies would say).

The stage was very rough and undulating in the beginning, with large and loose rocks sticking out and lots of ruts. About 5 km from the start, there was a breakaway when the road started to incline with Austrian Christoph Sokoll, Belgian Kevin Hulsmans and the two Aussies Justin Morris and Brad Davies. They gained one minute maximum. "We all suffered", said Davies, the leader in the Master 2 category. "I told Kevin, this is the real Crocodile Trophy. This is a fantastic course. He didn't seem to agree with me, but hey, no worries!"

On the first technical climb, race leader Urs Huber then accelerated. Boelen followed. Those two caught the four and swiftly left them behind. Later, Wolfgang Krenn and Mike Mulkens did the same and joined the two leaders. The Top 4 of the GC were in front again, but not for long as Mulkens and Krenn were dropped on a second steep rough climb. "We tried to hang on for dear life, Mike and me, but the two were just too strong", said Krenn at the finish. There was a section over particularly rough terrain, which almost everyone needed to walk. Some did it for 500 meters of it, others for only 50. And then there was the downhill. Big gaps opened up as a lot of guys struggled and found it too difficult. There were punctures too, left, right and centre. One of the big victims was Geeni Yong Choi from Korea. Choi, the King of the Downhill, they call him by now.

The downhill sections made all the difference in the field behind the first four in the race. The Koreans and Australians, who ride lots of single trails, had the upper hand and could take advantage of their experience. They rode away from the seasoned road riders. Kevin Hulsmans formulated it this way: "I had the impression that they flew over the rocks while I was riding under the ground." Team-mate Huub Duijn was just too scared to follow the others. "It is more or less the first time in my life that I do a mountain bike race. Honestly, I was frightened to descent. I still have a road season to do and cannot risk my life or my career."

The verdict after the 'bad' zone: Huber and Boelen in the lead, followed by Mulkens and Krenn at only 20 seconds. The two Koreans Park and Choi followed at 5 minutes, the quartet Davies, Hulsmans, Graeme and Hayat at 6.30. Surprisingly, the numbers 5 and 6 of the GC, Josef Benedseder and Christoff Sokoll from Team Eybl, were nowhere in sight at the front. They followed with a gap of 18 minutes.

"Bene had a puncture when we were riding in 6th and 7th position', tells Sokoll. "As I am a teammate, I waited for him. We lost a lot of time. On top of it all, in his spare tube there appeared to be a small leak too. So we had to change twice. The most important thing was to reach the finish line. Tomorrow is a long stage. It will not be so technical, so we will have a chance then to win the stage."

In the front there was a nice battle between the duo's Huber-Boelen and Mulkens-Krenn. For about 15 km the latter duo hang around the 20 second mark. "They didn't let us come closer", told Mulkens. "Krenn and I slowed down a bit then, more or less pretending that we were unable to come closer and hoping that they would slow down in the front too, but they didn't. They took one minute immediately. But at the end it is simple: the best two riders were in front."

"Of course we didn't want to let them join us", said Jeroen Boelen."I remember day two of this race, when we were also with more riders in the front, it was always Urs and I who had to do the work. I prefer not to have people sitting on my backwheel, leeching off me. At the feed zone they almost caught us as we stopped there to take food and to clean our cassettes that had been full of grass. When we saw them arriving, we jumped on our bikes again."

"We were surprised too", said Mulkens. "The difference was only 200 meters. As I still had one full bottle, I told Krenn not to stop at the feed zone in order to catch Huber and Boelen. I just wanted to throw away my empty bottle, but by mistake I threw away my full bottle... So we both stopped for some seconds. We chased at a speed of 45 km/h, but didn't come any closer. Those two in the front were of course not stupid either."

Huber and Boelen understood each other perfectly. "It was an advantage to stay there with only two in the front", commented red jersey Urs Huber. "It is all less tactical and with one against one you still have 50 percent chance to win. The second part of the race was very fast with a lot of tail wind. The course was very undulating, but unfortunately there was no little climb anymore where I could have dropped Jeroen."

The lack of a steep climb at the final section was indeed the luck of Boelen who is a better sprinter compared to Huber. Boelen took his second consecutive stage win and leads now in the points classification. More than seven minutes later, Mulkens finished third ahead of Krenn.

"At 20 km from the finish I told Mike that I would not sprint for the stage win", said the Austrian Bike Team Kaiser rider, "Yesterday Mike was so strong and alone in the front for such a long time, but got nothing at the finish. He deserved the podium today."

So where are the riders recovering from today's stage? At a cool billabong with green grass to lie in the shade of huge gum trees, an outdoor camp kitchen with a couple of lounges... and all of this at the foothills of Mount Mulligan. The massive rock formation is an 18 kilometre sandstone ridge that dominates the surrounding savannah landscape. The ochre coloured mountain cliffs are about 10 times the size of Uluru. Tomorrow a long stage is waiting for the riders. 189 km between the cattle

stations of Mt Mulligan and Mt Mulgrave. Five feeding stations will be operating to keep the riders fuelled. "Slightly hilly all day", says the guide book...

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