



Czechs Dominate Stage One

Czech team VIG+ racing dominated today's opening stage of the 2008 Crocodile Trophy, claiming all three men's podium places, in what proved to be a thoroughly dominant performance and an ominous sign for rivals.

The Czechs attacked immediately following the race start on today's opening 80 kilometre stage from Mareeba to Irvinebank, using all six elite team members to build a stage winning lead, before the race hit the first serious off-road section.



Tomas Trunschka

The team, built around two-time Crocodile Trophy second place-getter Ondrej Fojtik, showed it has a variety of attacking weapons at the 2008 edition of Australia's outback classic.

Champion marathoners Ivan Rybarik and Martin Horak featured in the breakaway move, but it was team-mate Tomas Trunschka who stamped his name on the opening stage, crossing the finish line solo, with a blistering time of 2.37.10.

Fojtik and Horak finished a further two minutes and thirty seconds back, to make it an all Czech podium.

"We decided to ride together as a team on the opening asphalt section, but when we went into the bush it was every man for himself," Trunschka said.

The Czech's managed to put more than four minutes between themselves and their nearest international rival, Belgium's Nicolas Vermeulen, making it a commanding, but by no means race winning lead.

"It was very good and we are happy we place in the first three, but the race is very long and this is only one day," the experienced Fojtik said as he considered the distant prospect of a Czech winning the 2008 Crocodile Trophy.

"We are six people and the other guys are one or two.

"It's very important to have a team in this race and for me it is the first trophy when I have a team."

Fourth placed Vermeulen and sixth placed Australian Craig Gordon both struggled with the early pace on the asphalt, but both made up valuable time when the Crocodile Trophy moved to its favoured surface on the rocky washed-out trails of Australia's remote Far North.

Vermeulen, the Belgian marathon champion and Gordon, the former World 24 hour solo champion, both ended the day pleased with their overall efforts.

"That road section at the beginning, I was in the second group and the Czech guys went away with the Merida guys," Gordon said.

"As soon as we got to the dirt I picked my game up, but I was just caught napping."

The challenge ahead for Gordon is to ride with intent on the flatter sections and wait for the mountains to pounce, but he admits the Czech's have a distinct advantage.



"Rock Star" Craig Gordon going hard

"If they've got four guys in the top G.C. it's going to be very hard," he said.

Vermeulen will also spend some quiet time under the outback's million evening stars, pondering how to beat the Czechs.

"The legs are good, not super for me," Vermeulen said.

"I made a little mistake in the first kilometres, the fist group rides away and I go, yes, no.

"I lost four or five minutes today but it's not so bad, nine days to go yet."



Adrian Jackson
after faceplanting

Australia's top-rated team, Merida Flight Centre, had a difficult day on the road to Irvinebank. The team of Tim Bennett, Nick Both and Adrian Jackson was forced to dig deep chasing down the Czech breakaway.

And their day got a lot worse when Jackson crashed hard on a technical descent in the outback scrub west of Mareeba.

"Just on the really technical, rough descent I wasn't paying attention enough and got in a rut and went over the hangers," Jackson said, recounting his nasty crash.

The Victorian is sporting a wound to his chin and cuts to his wrist and legs but will fight on, hoping to payback team-mates who stopped to check on his injuries.

Better news for Merida Flight Centre is the performance of Jo Bennett, who leads the women's category by more than four minutes from Belgian Karen Steurs.

Bennett's background in ironman triathlon is sure to be a benefit as she looks to consolidate her position during tomorrow's second stage , a 128 kilometre journey from Irvinebank to Koombooloomba dam.



The Crocodile Trophy of 2008 gets underway in Mareeba

Event Partners





2008 Crocodile Trophy Stage Plan

Stage 1.

Mareeba—Irvinebank 86km/1100m Tuesday, 21. October

Stage 2.

Irvinebank—Koombooloomba 128km/1400m Wednesday, 22. October

Stage 3.

Koombooloomba-Gunnawarra 122km/2235m Thursday, 23. October

Stage 4.

Gunnawarra-Chillagoe 130km/900m Friday, 24. October

Stage 5.

Chillagoe-Chillagoe 120km/850m Saturday, 25. October

Stage 6.

Chillagoe-Mount Mulgrave 138km/800m Sunday, 26. October

Stage 7.

Mount Mulgrave-Laura 148km/1100m Monday, 27. October

Stage 8.

Laura-Cooktown 142km/1050m Tuesday, 28. October

Stage 9.

Cooktown-Ayton 128km/1900m Wednesday, 29. October

Stage 10.

Ayton-Cape Tribulation 48km/520m Thursday, 30. October

