



Act of Sportsmanship in Popular Czech Victory

Czech team VIG+ racing continued its complete dominance today at the 2008 Crocodile Trophy with Martin Horak scoring his first stage win and fourth consecutive stage win for his team as the off-road classic reached the Australian outback town of Chillagoe

The victory will be remembered for all the right reasons, with Horak, in the most sporting of gestures, rendering assistance when his breakaway partner, Kristof Hertsens of Belgium (Team Lingier) crashed.

Hertsens was left bloodied and suffered a deep cut to his elbow after hitting the deck on a technical off-road section of today's epic 143 kilometre stage, that started on the coolest of Crocodile Trophy mornings at glorious Gunnawarra lagoon.



Hertsens and Horak

In a move that ultimately cost him the lead in the General Classification, Horak assisted Hertsens with repairing his damaged bike and checked on the Belgian's injuries, before riding alongside him to the finish line. The story of Hertsens and Horak is, in time, sure to take its place in Crocodile Trophy history as one of the great moments of the race.

After being the lead conspirator in a breakaway move that went virtually from the gun, Hertsens (Team Lingier) was happy to settle for second place against the clearly superior Czech – a man for whom he now has the utmost respect.

"I crashed really, really bad and he was coming back and he fixed my bike," Hertsens said.

"He then rode in the front and he stayed with me.

"He was really strong and when he attacked I could not go with him, but he stayed with me, so I am very happy to finish second."

Horak's selfless act cost him valuable minutes and saw him finish the day 39 seconds behind teammate Ondrej Fojtik in the General Classifications.

With VIG+ Racing holding a firm grip on the top three places on G.C. and the nearest challenger, Nic Vermeulen of Belgium 11.03 behind the leader in fourth place - the position for the Czechs appears to be ideal.

Until now the only question has been, who of the three Czechs - Fojtik, Trunschka and Horak will lead the Team VIG+ in its quest for ultimate glory in Cape Tribulation?

This evening, as the sporting gestures continued to flow, that question was answered.

At a meeting of the VIG+ team under the shady trees of the Chillagoe campground, the sporting Czechs decided to dedicate their team efforts to producing an overall victory for Fojtik, the man who built the reputation of the Crocodile Trophy in the Czech Republic.

A veteran of two Crocodile Trophy campaigns in 2004 and 2007, Fojtik came to Australia alone and unable to speak the language on his first visit. He was confronted with the most brutal conditions the Crocodile Trophy ever experienced in some of the most remote country on the planet. He rode away with second place - not to mention the respect of all involved in the race.

A popular figure at The Trophy, Fojtik backed up at his second attempt last year to finish second again. Now, his great dream is just six days and six million corrugations away and will take every ounce of strength he can produce.

“Of course, it is very good to still have the lead and my team is very much behind me,” Fojtik said.

“They want me to win the Crocodile Trophy if I am strong enough.”

Comparing the scenario now to his previous experiences there are obvious differences.

“Of course, to have a team support me makes a very big difference,” he said.

“I cannot win this race without my team.”

As for Vermeulen, the Belgian has retained the enthusiasm with which he entered the race, despite needing a run of back luck for the Czechs to give himself any chance of standing on the final podium.



Belgian Eric Vanderaerden in termite country

The Team Lingier cyclist tried again to attack today, but such efforts have been fruitless so far against the all-powerful Czechs.

“For me it’s really difficult, when I attack they go after me,” Vermeulen said.

“I know that the last section was very fast, so difficult for getting time back. That’s O’k.

Fifth placed Australian Craig Gordon is also urgently searching for solutions to the Czech dilemma. The World 24 Hour solo champion from 2006 has been dealing with intestinal issues in recent days and without the benefit of a team to support him, can do little to offset the tactics of the Czechs.

“Today was more like a road-race, although we did have the sand section, but the Czechs were so strong once again,” Gordon said.

The Australian, who is meticulous about preparation, has been busy consulting his medical team and hopes to resolve one of the key issues that plagues riders at the Crocodile Trophy - hydration and electrolyte replenishment.

“I’ve spoken to two of my sports doctors and I think I’ve been mixing my electrolyte drinks too strong, and that could be what’s giving me gastro” Gordon said.



Martin Horak—one of the Czech weapons

The women's race produced its own milestone with the first ever female sprint finish between Jo Bennett of Australia's Merida Flight Centre Team and Belgian Karen Steurs of Team Ride For The Stars.

Steurs was awarded the stage after race control called for the photo and was judged to have snatched the win by the length of nobby-tread

"It was easier than yesterday for me, although the first part was difficult," Steurs said.

"It's a really good day for me."

Bennett wasn't sure who had won the sprint at first, after being pipped on the line by her friendly rival.

"It went down to a sprint, very much like a road race today, the first section was hard, we had that bit of sand," Bennett said.

The Western Australian still leads the general classification, but it was difficult to discern any conflict today as the two leading women embraced at the finish line.

Bennett is being supported at this race by husband Tim as her domestique and Steurs by her partner Christophe Huybrighs.

The 29-year-old Antwerpen is racing the Crocodile Trophy as the final event of her career. Like Bennett, Steurs is a former triathlete who has taken a shine to cycling.



Karen Steurs and Jo Bennett

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

