



Fojtik Snatches Race Lead as Czech Dream Continues

Czech cyclist Ondrej Fojtik is one step closer to achieving his dream of winning the Crocodile Trophy after snatching the leaders jersey from the shoulders of team-mate Tomas Trunschka during today's second stage from Irvinebank to Koombooloomba Dam in Tropical North Queensland.

For the second day in succession the Czech VIG+ Racing team put the hammer down in a determined effort to split the race apart. It was a tactic that brought the same reward as yesterday, a one-two-three podium finish for the Czechs, who are far exceeding pre-race expectations with a thoroughly dominant performance.

Fojtik and team-mate Ivan Rybarik escaped from the lead bunch at the fifty kilometre mark, despite the combined efforts of Australia's Merida Flight Centre Team, Belgian champion Nicolas Vermeulen and Rockstar Racing's Craig Gordon, who worked together to limit the damage.



Ivan Rybarik sets the pace

In the end Fojtik gifted the stage win to his team-mate, who helped the two-time second place getter at Australia's outback classic into the race lead for the first time.

"For me this is my third time at the Crocodile Trophy and it is the first time I have taken the leader's jersey, so this is very special for me," Fojtik said.

Rybarik was equally pleased with claiming his first stage victory at the Crocodile Trophy and the second successive stage win for his team, in what is, so far, a totally dominant performance.

"Yeah it was very good, I went with Ondrej around fifty kilometres and Ondrej said we will go until the finish," Rybarik said.

"For me this is great and for the team this is perfect.

"In our country this race is very popular and I think in professional cycling it's very great when you can win this race overall and win two stages."

Again today, the other key protagonists of the Crocodile Trophy were left emotionally, if not physically exhausted as their latest plan to work together to unseat the dominant team at this year's race came unstuck. At least the weather has been kind to the riders with mild daytime temperatures and cool nights. It's the Czech's that are leaving the would-be contenders feeling dazed and confused.

Belgian marathon MTB Champion Nic Vermuelen appears to be running out of ideas, but is hoping tomorrow will be a different story as the race heads onto the famed "Powerline Track" for a stage of pure mountainbiking.

"It was the same like yesterday today, the block of the Czech team, there are too many good riders," Vermeulen admitted.

"Maybe I'm physically the best but they attack with two guys, I gone after them, but it was too difficult."

Vermeulen was happy to receive support from the Australians on a day when the major objective for all the non-Czechs in the race was to limit the damages.

That said, the outlook is bleak for the likes of Vermeulen, Gordon, Nick Both, Tim Bennett and Adrian Jackson in terms of any G.C. hopes they may have harboured.

Team VIG+ now occupies the top four places on G.C., with Vermeulen the nearest outsider, more than ten minutes off the pace. Gordon is the best placed of the Australians at 15.58 behind Fojtik and with tomorrow's profile suiting the technically skilled rider, it may be the best chance anyone has of gaining time on the seemingly unbeatable Czechs.

In the women's event Australia's Jo Bennett of the Merida Flight Centre team rode a sound tactical race. But the day belonged to Belgian Karen Steurs, who attacked Bennett in the final kilometres, to peg back just a handful of seconds from the Australian's lead of more than four minutes.

It could be that the Bennett, the former ironwoman, is saving something for tomorrow's stage on the powerline track, which could prove decisive.

"I Sort of wanted to take it a little easier, but it wasn't at the end," Bennett said.

"Karen did a fantastic job today, just got away at the end, it was good, a fun day.

But I still have the jersey, I'll try and hold onto it as much as I can."



Jo Bennett Psyched for the race start



Jo Bennett follows the wheel of Matt Powell

Steurs is sure to have other ideas. The Belgian is gradually applying the pressure and could be timing her race assault to perfection, with the pivotal stage next-up.

"In the final I tried to get away and tried to get some time back," Steurs said of today's tactic.

"with five k I think I get away from her.

"I like climbing, so we'll see tomorrow what happens."

Vanderaerden Loving It

Temptation was all around during today's second stage for Belgian cycling great Eric Vanderaerden as the race passed by more than a few outback watering holes.

But the man who has shed twenty kilos to return to competition held steadfast against the lure of a cleansing ale, especially while the cameras were upon him.

Photographed passing by the pub in the Atherton Tableland Town of Herberton, the former winner of Paris-Roubaix had his eyes firmly fixed on the road ahead and his ultimate objective of finishing the Crocodile Trophy.

It's a case of, to borrow Cadel Evans' favourite phrase, "so far, so good" for Vanderaerden, who was forced to abandon the Crocodile Trophy at his first attempt.

"Still at this moment for everything I want to do at the croc is o'k," an extremely relaxed Vanderaerden said as he lazed in the rainforested event campsite at Koombooloomba Dam.

"I'm not in that good shape for having a good result, but it's good so far."

"There are a lot of Belgian riders, but I'm riding with almost everybody, it's a nice experience."



Eric Vanderaerden

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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

