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Heat Takes Toll As Riders Reach Laura

The great Dutchman Bart Brentjens today claimed his fifth consecutive Crocodile Trophy stage against a backdrop of searing heat, serious crashes and remarkable feats of endurance from competitors who struggled to reach the finish of the 151 kilometre journey from Mount Mulgrave to Laura.

With the mercury hovering above 45 degrees for most of the day, conditions were at the absolute extreme of what riders could tolerate on a day when they also had to negotiate stony trails, deep corrugations and sand patches on the Outback roads of Australia's Cape York.



Bart Brentjens on the road to Laura

At the end of five agonising hours in the saddle, Brentjens finally managed to shake race leader Urs Huber, Belgian Mike Mulkens and Slovenia's Jure Robic in a sprint finish. In the process he gained only a handful of seconds on time bonuses, with opportunities running out to haul in the race lead of the Swiss Huber, which stands at 1 minute and 1 second.

"That was long and hot, it wasn't that good as it was supposed to be on the roadbook, pretty rough terrain, rough gravel, some loose parts, loose sand and the heat, the heat kills you every day," a visibly exhausted Brentjens said.

"Urs, he was pushing the hammer down really hard from the river crossing, he already spent a lot of energy and I was on his wheel."

Brentjens is looking to tomorrow's Queen stage from Laura to Cooktown to possibly launch an attack on the overall race leader, who continues to hang on in the toughest of circumstances.

"Definitely if there will be a chance I will do it, but today it was hot and I know from yesterday, I blew up before the finish," Brentjens said.

"I try to make a good attack maybe tomorrow or the day after."

Huber appears to be feeling more confident by the day, knowing the profile over the next two stages includes numerous hills, where the Swiss mountain man is most at home.

"I think today was the last flat stage so Brentjens have won five seconds again," Huber said.

"So I still have one minute in front overall and the next two days are with more mountains so I think that's good for me."

Disaster Strikes For Australia's Prete

Stage seven of the Crocodile Trophy turned into a disaster for Australia's Tropical Tableland Discovery Team after its leader, teenager Josh Prete, crashed heavily at the crossing of the Palmer River and snapped his right collarbone.

Up until that point, the burgeoning Australian talent was riding with the race leaders, but his Crocodile Trophy campaign went to hell crossing the very same river which his Grandfather once mined for gold.

"Just going into the Palmer River it was really sandy and dusty and there was about four guys in front of me," Prete said.

"I couldn't see anything and just went straight down onto my collarbone and I think someone hit from behind."

Prete was treated on scene by race doctor Alexandra Reimann before being transported to Cooktown hospital for x-rays.

He returned to the Crocodile Trophy campsite this evening to view x-rays of the injury with Doctor Reimann and fellow competitor Dr Andrew Graham who is also an orthopaedic surgeon.

The prognosis is that the injured collarbone will require surgery.

"I'm happy that I exceeded my expectations in this race, but unhappy that I didn't finish," a clearly disappointed Prete said.

"I wanted to have one really good stage, which is what I was hoping for, but I'll have to come back next year."

Zeldenrust Wins Women's Sprint

Today's women's race also ended in a sprint finish after the group containing the three racer leaders stayed intact over the 151 kilometre journey.

Eager to place her stamp of authority on the race at the end of it's most difficult stage, Dutch race leader Monique Zeldenrust outsprinted her rivals Abby McLennan and Lisa Pleyer to maintain her absolute stranglehold on the race.

"I know the other girls wanted to win today, but I really wanted to win this stage too," a determined Zeldenrust said.

McLennan, who continues to gather strength, placed second, with Pleyer third.



Josh Prete receives treatment

How Hot Was Today's Race?

The heat on today's Crocodile Trophy stage seemed to catch riders by surprise, given so-far this has been a relatively cool Crocodile Trophy.

Monitoring the conditions on course, Dr Andrew Graham of the Jungle Patrol Wilderness Medicine Team provided insight into the seriousness of the climate situation.



Experienced Campaigners Andrew Graham, Sharman Parr and Greg Parr

"It was on the clock 45.5 degrees Celsius, pretty accurate gauges and everyone would have had minimum ten litres of water," Dr Graham said.

"Some of the bigger guys had 14 litres of water today.

"It's certainly as tough as I've seen, certainly tougher than walking the Kokoda trail."

Sharman Parr, who has completed many of the world's difficult endurance feats including the Hawaii ironman, has coped well on the trail, but has learned not to underestimate the race.

"I'm fortunate that the boys looked after me, it brought back flashes of Hawaii," Parr said.

"The guys were great and they got me through.

"It's only like one day in Hawaii, it's what day seven today? Hawaii's easy compared to this.



Chris Neal finishes the stage

Today's last-placed finisher, Australian Chris Neal, made it to the finish line in just on ten hours as the sun set over Laura's mythical Quinkan country.

"It wasn't too bad out there," Neal said.

"I even stopped and had a swim in a Billabong."

Tomorrow's queen stage from Laura to Cooktown will be another difficult challenge. The race will pass through real crocodile country in Lakefield National Park, before riders battle a stiff headwind into Cooktown.

The ultimate reward will be finishing atop Grassy Hill, where views over the Pacific Ocean await.

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The Crocodile Trophy is benefiting from funding under the Queensland Events Regional Development Program (QERDP). The QERDP is an investment program designed to extend the flow of economic and social benefits of events to regional Queensland.

A state-wide initiative, the program is committed to enhancing existing events in regional Queensland, as well as assisting in the establishment of new events.

Since the QERDP began in 2001, more than \$12.5 million has been invested in 600 regional events, an indicator of the important role these events play in their communities and wider Queensland.

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