



International Crocodile Trophy 2011

Stage 6, 23 October 2011

Unbeatable Huber beaten by heat, distance and puncture

Urs Huber was ready to win his third consecutive Crocodile Trophy. He only needed to follow his biggest competitor Jeroen Boelen, but in the marathon stage over 189 km Huber broke. Like most of the riders today, also Huber punctured, but he also ran out of energy in the hot outback of Queensland. Some of the vehicles with drinks and energy gels had gotten stuck in the Mitchell river and needed to be pulled across by others. It was a stage full of unexpected challenges and turns of events for all. In the end, Jeroen Boelen (Milka-Trek-Bart Brentjens Mountain Bike Team) won the stage to Mt Mulgrave and took the leader's jersey from the Swiss champion.

"This is cycling. This kind of riding makes my day", said Austrian René Haselbacher after his 189 km ride through the desert. "This here is like the feeling you have when you finish Paris-Roubaix. If you asked me now, I would just consider to start racing again." The retired road professional said all that even after having flatted when he was riding in the lead. Not all riders shared Hasi's opinion in the finish. Australian Brad Davies flatted 5 times and lost his leader's jersey in the Masters category. "What am I doing here? Where were the cars with our drinks and food?", exclaimed a furious Kevin Hulsmans. Surprisingly strong Korean rider Geeni Yong Choi didn't stop repeating "never did something like this in my life". But his eyes brightened up soon again.

Some support vehicles had become stuck with a flooded engine at the deep Mitchell river, halfway through the race. The river was too deep to cross for most of them. After breakneck manoeuvres including getting them towed across the river that also carried a strong current and swapping drinks and food among them, it took them a long time to catch up to the fast lead groups. However, for some riders the misery had started earlier already, after 15 km. At the front, a group of 22 riders formed after a speedy start, among them Belgian Bruno Naessens who straight after crashed in a sandy section. Another Belgian, Jan Verboven couldn't escape the crash anymore. With an injured left knee, Verboven started to chase and managed to come back in the front. He would later finish the stage in 11th position. Naessens' front wheel was completely buckled and he wobbled for 175 km further, all alone.

As the race progressed in the hot midday heat, the front group became smaller and smaller. What contributed to this was a crash (Michal Lanik), a broken chain (Steve Petre), punctures (Brad Davies champion with 5), a sun stroke (Chang Min Park), but mainly it was because of a strong attack at the 30 km mark by Austrians René Haselbacher and Josef Benedseder, as well as Belgian Kevin Hulsmans. In the back, Jeroen Boelen - Huber's challenger for the GC and 4 minutes behind the Swiss rider - saw his chance at the first crossing of the Mitchell river (km 50). All riders had to walk through the river that carried a high current, but Boelen was the only one who managed to stay on the bike. And he was gone, chasing the front trio ahead of him. Boelen succeeded to bridge the one-minute gap. The cohesion in the front was perfect. A chasing Huber didn't come closer. On the contrary.

“But then we had to stop at a closed cattle gate”, explains Boelen. “Instead of climbing over it, we decided to open it, but that didn’t go as expected. We lost some time and Huber was there again. This could have been my chance to take back minutes to Huber as he was alone, and I was with three others for the remaining 150 kilometers.”

With Huber back, riders looking at each other and the pace slowing down, other riders returned to the front. It felt, like the race had started all over again. And it did till again Haselbacher, Hulsmans and Benedseder went away. This time with Christoph Sokoll. Hulsmans, as well as Haselbacher punctured. With only the two Austrian teammates Sokoll-Benedseder in the front, Huber and Boelen made the race harder in the background. “I had already given up on gaining back time on Huber”, said Boelen, “But I just hoped for a third stage win and Huber looked like he wanted the same.”

Boelen and Huber went harder and harder. Together with Mike Mulkens they arrived at the front, dropped Sokoll and then, suddenly... Huber had to stop, some 60 km from the finish.

“I had already had a flat tyre after 15 minutes in the race”, commented Huber. “The whole season I had no puncture at all and I did a lot of races. I put some air in it and the tube held and looked to hold up with the sealing liquid in my tube. After two hours, however, it lost air again. I inflated the tire again as I didn’t dare to change the tube. Otherwise I would have lost the group with Boelen. In the end, however, I really had to change my tube and Jeroen was gone.”

“Immediately, I thought that this was again my chance to take back some time. Of course Urs Huber would have been able to come back, but in that case he would have lost a lot of energy in the chasing job. And is it unfair? I also had two punctures earlier in the race, but I was apparently luckier.”

Huber didn’t come back any more. Boelen in the front was strong, didn’t seem to struggle with the heat – “where is that rain?” begged so many riders after the finish – dropped Mulkens and at 10 km from the finish also Benedseder.

“I tried to follow and help Jeroen Boelen as much as I could as I thought I could take the stage win, while he would be happy with the time bonus, but Jeroen was too strong. In the end I was more like a fifth wheel on the car for him”, said a disappointed Benedseder. “Huber followed at a 5-minute distance; I understood very well that Boelen could not wait for me.”

Those last ten km Boelen was indeed flying (31 km/h the whole day over 189 km). Both Benedseder and Huber lost five minutes extra.

“With my flat tyre I only lost two minutes, I guess”, explained Huber, the big loser of the day. “But the last two (of five) feed zones were not in place and that was a big problem for me as I had no bottles or sugars with me. I had not enough energy for the last two hours of the race. It was a long way to the finish for me, but that’s racing. I hope I can still get out of this situation over the next four days.”

After chilling out at the creek of Mt Mulgrave Station this afternoon and the bush camping overnight, tomorrow’s 7th stage goes from Mt Mulgrave to Laura. Laura is a small settlement with 80 residents, mainly aboriginals. After two days in the middle of nowhere, the race finishes again in a town and everyone is looking forward to a small piece of civilisation.

Media services

- Pictures – free of charge - will be available on our server and website www.crocodile-trophy.com. Please credit them as per the details below.
- Browse photo highlights and download low-res (a 2011 site will be set up):
<http://www.crocodile-trophy.com/trophy/photo.html>
- High-res pictures can be obtained on demand. During the race we will regularly cut a 3 minute report also including interviews. They will be available for download on our server.

Photos: Crocodile Trophy 2011

Video: Filmix

- Download high-res images and video: <http://www2.croc.at/croc/downloads/>
A 2011 file folder will be created
user: croc
password: croc

Contact details for media inquiries and images:

Philippe Maertens

Media Liaison all countries

Mobile: +32 470 81 03 46

Email: crocodiletrophy@telenet.be

Web: www.crocodile-trophy.com

Juliane Wisata

Rocky Trail Entertainment Pty Ltd

Media Liaison Australia/NZ/Germany/Austria

Mobile: +61 416 737 972

Email: juliane@rockytrailentertainment.com

trailbunny@gmail.com