



**International Crocodile Trophy 2011**

**Stage 10, 27 October 2011**

## **Jeroen Boelen confirms his supremacy and is the second Dutch Crocodile Trophy overall winner**

**He won five of the ten stages, he worked where needed and made himself popular with riders and race staff alike. There's no doubt that the 33-year-old rider deserves to be the overall winner of the 17<sup>th</sup> Crocodile Trophy. After 1200 kilometers across the rainforests and outback of North Queensland he finished with almost an hour's lead of Austrians Wolfgang Krenn and Josef Benedseder. The result could have been different, if main challenger Urs Huber from Switzerland hadn't dropped out on the eve of the 9<sup>th</sup> stage. Jeroen Boelen (Milka-Trek) is a successful former road rider and his mountain bike career has now just begun. Earlier this year he finished, with Bart Brentjens, 7<sup>th</sup> in the Cape Epic.**

"This victory is so important for me and for the team", said winner Boelen. "The Crocodile Trophy has a big name in mountain bike community. It is important for my sponsors too. Without sponsors we have no sport. I am glad I can give them this victory."

The race promised to be a battle between Swiss champion Urs Huber, former Olympic champion Bart Brentjens and Belgian rider Mike Mulkens. The numbers 1, 2 and 3 of the last two years were back with the same ambition, to win this crazy mountain bike race.

Bart Brentjens (43) had arrived sick in Cairns and was unable to start on October 18th. Urs Huber (26) got sick during the race and Mike Mulkens (31) just missed that little extra power. After having been overall third two years in a row, the Belgian rider aimed for a stage win. In Laura he was close to his goal till a puncture on the last kilometer ruined his plans. In Irvinbank "Iron Mike" was caught at 4K from the finish after a marathon breakaway.

That Huber got sick could have been caused by the terrible weather during the first two days of the race. Stage 1 needed to be neutralized as support cars were unable to ride the course, which had deteriorated rapidly due to torrential downpours. An epic Stage 2 in the never ending rain already saw an Urs Huber who was unable to follow when the road went up. He went away on the terrible Mount Baldy and would stay away till the end. Only Dutch rider Jeroen Boelen, Bart Brentjens' pupil, could keep the damage a bit under control. Huber was in search for a unique third in a row overall victory. Earlier this year he won already 8 races including the Craft Bike, Transalp, the Grand Raid and the Dolomiti Superbike. Huber continued to show his strength in a – due to the rain – modified Stage 3.

Boelen raced very consistently for ten days long and claimed his moment of honor in the 4th stage. It would not be his last victory. The former road rider is fast at the finish, but also just strong. "I think I am more talented as a road rider, but I needed a new challenge", he explained. In his former road career Boelen won two stages in Olympia's Tour (Netherlands) and was overall winner of the Tour de

Liège (Belgium) ahead of Robert Gesink and Johnny Hoogerland and the Route Nivernaise Morvan (France).

“Many people told me that I am too social, or better not enough non-social to be professional road rider”, continued Jeroen Boelen. “But I don’t regret having become a mountain biker now.”

Boelen won Stage 5 and 6. It was in that 189 kilometer 6<sup>th</sup> stage that he took the leader’s jersey. Huber looked unbeatable, but broke that day. Like most of the riders that day, 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. Instead of leading with 4 minutes, he had to make up 7 minutes. Huber counted on making that up in the long sand stage 9, but by then he was not in the race any more.

With or without Huber, the race stayed very animated as the Austrian riders were very active. Former pro rider René Haselbacher attacked every day. Wolfgang Krenn and Josef Benedseder rode a consistent race. Their overall 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place reflects the right stance in the Crocodile Trophy peloton. Christoph Sokoll won the stage in Laura and with Boelen winning 50 percent of the stages, it was not foreseeable for others to win a stage. More than once the Austrians played a tactical game with the Darrell Lea team-mates Kevin Hulsmans and Huub Duyn. Hulsmans attacked every day as well, but did not get a prize. His teammate Duyn did, as he was the stage winner in Kalpowar.

Behind the elite riders, the battle between the Master riders was as interesting. Especially the Australian home riders were impressive. Graeme Arnott, Mark Griffin, Brad Davies, Ashley Hayat, Justin Morris, all guys with a full time job, working a whole year to perform well in this race, were every day in the front. The respect they got from the pro’s was huge.

The Crocodile Trophy saw participants from Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Korea, Czech Republic, Italy, USA, South Africa and Denmark. The three Koreans surprised a lot. Geeni Yong Choi was the hero of stage 9, finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> in the long and sandy queen stage. Surprisingly, he did not start any more in the last stage as he suffered from his left knee not wanting to jeopardize his coming season.

The biggest respect from all participants was for the two US handbikers. After stage 6 they arrived at the Crocodile Trophy Camp after 18 hours on their bikes, unfortunately not able to start the day after, due to a heat stroke (Patrik Doak) and an open skin wound (Carlos Moleda). Their teammate and supporter Andrew Chafer continued till the end in Hope Vale and got the biggest applause of all.

The last stage to Hope Vale didn’t change anything anymore to the GC. After a 60 K break of Chris Hellman from Australia, Belgian Roeland Suys and Austrian Martin Wisata, the road riders under the mountain bikers gave a demonstration of tactics and speed. The Austrians and the Darrell Lea guys fought it out, but in the end Jeroen Boelen won. His mentor Bart Brentjens may be proud.

“Bart and I are as strong”, concluded Jeroen Boelen. “We would have started here together and observed during the first days which one of us was going to do best and then make up plans together.

Now, I did it alone. It was harder, but the pleasure is even bigger now.”

The Crocodile Trophy will return to Far North Queensland in 2012 with race organizer Gerhard Schönbacher – “I already have ideas for the track next year...”, he promised today.

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