

Hi All

The Honda Mountain Trophy 2-day stage race - placed 1st

The inaugural Honda Mountain Trophy event kicked off with Stage 1 on Saturday - a 75km stage around Maropeng near Magaliesberg. The pace was pretty quick the first 10k out of Maropeng and onto some district road, but as we hit the technical single-track 14k in, the bunch promptly split up and the going got tough. I got into an early lead and really enjoyed the rocky descents taking us down to some single track that wound through a riverbed. Just before the first waterpoint I punctured, losing a little time and positions to Theresa Ralph and Joke Hoffman, but I soon caught and passed them again and kept a steady tempo going. That is until the 'virgin territory' single-track - where a rhythm was just impossible, some seriously tricky obstacles made the riding a real challenge, deep river crossings had us on and off our saddles, and the rocky climbs had most of us pushing our bikes. It certainly wasn't an easy route and the last 15km of uncut grass riding that took us toward the finish line was enough to break one mentally. I finished up 1st in the women on this stage and managed to place 6th overall.

Stage 2 was a much shorter stage, 46km in total...for most riders anyway - a wrong turn had a couple of us riding 6.5k extra!

Again the start was really intense, but the technical descents 4 or 5k in spaced the field out nicely. After the 10k waterpoint, we hit a brutal climb that forced most of us off our bikes on certain stretches. At the top of this climb, a distraction and some misdirection by some of the 'adventure' riders had a couple of us take a wrong turn, which lead us on 6.5k detour back to the 10k waterpoint after which we had re-ride the climb! At this stage I figured my 1st place was definitely lost, but with the 2nd and 3rd placed ladies from stage 1 not making it to the start line for stage 2, I hoped I could still make the podium overall, so rode as hard as I could to make up time. The route wasn't quite as challenging as the previous day's track, though it still featured some pretty rocky climbs and far too much grass! 42k in on my speedo, when I caught the 4th placed lady on the GC, I guessed I might still be in with a chance for the overall. Less than a kilometre from the finish I was relieved to catch Joke Hoffman - the leading lady, and managed to win the stage and the Honda Mountain Trophy.

Stage 1

1.	Carla Rowley	3:54:57
2.	Theresa Ralph	4:04:17
3.	Tanya Oosthuizen	4:29:15

Stage 2

1.	Carla Rowley	2:49:39
2.	Joke Hoffman	2:49:41
3.	Helen Gibbings	2:58:14

Overall

1.	Carla Rowley
2.	Joke Hoffman
3.	Helen Gibbings

This weekend I'll be travelling down to Natal to race the Karkloof Classic Marathon. All the top ladies should be on the start line, so looking forward to some good, hard racing.

Until next week.

Carla