

DIESEL CARE HELL OF THE WEST 2006

FRENCHMAN GAEL MAINARD CONQUERS HELL OF THE WEST TRIATHLON AT SECOND ATTEMPT

The notorious Diesel Care Hell of the West triathlon has been run and won by Frenchman Gael Mainard in his second attempt at the renowned Goondiwindi event. Gael won in a time of 3.57.31 approx 5 minutes ahead of second place finisher John Carey in 4.02.25 and third placed Steve Pratt in 4.04.31. Gael's first Hell of the West win came after a sound second place finish behind 2003 champion Mitch Dean when he finished just 1 minute 36 seconds behind the winner.

Buderim based Rebecca Preston also won her first Hell of the West title finishing an impressive 10th overall in a time of 4.13.16 almost six minutes ahead of American Sarah Groff in 4.19.09 and Toowoomba's Rebecca Coulter in 4.27.51.

The days leading up the event could only be described as oppressive, 40 degrees on Thursday, 40 on Friday and 41degrees on the Saturday before the event made everyone including race organizers a little tentative during race briefing on Saturday afternoon. Race director David Vincent announced to the assembled masses that the water temp in the river had been measured earlier that day at a staggering 30 degrees. Describing the next morning 5am swim start he said, "it will more like a giant bath tub than a triathlon start" joking that the only ingredient missing with water temps that high was a bar of soap.

Thankfully race morning arrived with a nice cooling wind a welcome savior, at least for the first few hours of the race. The first to exit the 2k swim in the murky McIntyre River was Murwillumba's Paul Mathews in 28.17 (after the 500 metre transition to the town park) with defending champion Cameron Watt close behind in 28.34 and Gael only four seconds behind in 28.38.

The first of the women, USA based Sarah Groff clocked an excellent time of 29.08, the 4th fastest of the day. Second lady was another American competitor Hillary Biscay just over a minute down on the leader in 30.18 and rounding out the top three ladies was eventual winner Rebecca Preston in 33.58, almost four minutes down on the leader.

It was now just after 5.30am & the grueling "dead flat" 80km bike course was ready to strike the unwary. Defending Champion Cameron Watt made his move from second after swim to take the lead prior to the 40km turn around but between 40 and 60km he disappeared from the radar. Later reports indicated he had suffered severe cramping and his quest for back to back Hell of the West titles was over.

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Cameron's bad luck shot Frenchman Gael into the lead but not before cycling guru Peter Donnelly mowed down the leader with a sizzling cycle split of 1.59.59 (the fastest of the day and the only cyclist to break 2hrs) to lead the field with a handy 1 minute buffer at the end of the cycle leg. Gael returned to town in second place with John Carey in third after placing 12th in the swim and Steve Pratt holding down 4th .

The ladies meanwhile were also battling rising temperatures and a nasty headwind on the way home. Swim leaders Americans Sarah Groff and Hillary Biscay had both been caught & passed by Rebecca Preston with a cycle split of 2.14.18, the fastest womens split of the day & the 30th fastest overall. Rebecca returned to transition with a handy 2 minute 21 second lead over Sarah with Hillary Biscay in third, Rebecca Coulter 4th & German Marion Pyrlik rounding out the top five.

Out on the run things really got tough with temps rising steadily well into the mid thirties and it was still only 8am. Gael passed Peter Donnelly to take the lead once again while Rebecca Preston showed her class by extending her lead to finish almost six minutes ahead of Sarah Groff, Meanwhile Toowoomba's Rebecca Coulter had run herself into third place ahead of the other American Hillary Biscay with German Marion Pyrik finishing 5th and another German Sandra Wallenhorst placing 9th , four of the top ten ladies were overseas based competitors.

Second placed John Carey recorded the fastest run of the day, an excellent time of 1.21.48 making up over 3 minutes on the winner during the 20k run but couldn't bridge the 8 minute lead he had given Gael at of the cycle leg. Steve Pratt ran into 3rd place with cycle leader Peter Donnelly fading to finish 4th .

On the local front a record number of five teams and two individuals took part with the best time of the day going to the team of Bailey, Dawson & Dawson with a combined time of 5.06.12. Swimmer Kate Bailey clocked 40.25 for the 2k swim, Jeremy Dawson completing the 80k cycle in 2.34.57 and his brother Josh the 20k run leg in 1.50.50 to place them 28th out of 62 teams that had started earlier in the day.

The team of Nat Loughman (40.19 swim), Brigid Nolan (2.35.53) and Emma Carrigan (2.03.08 run) had a mixed day recording the third fastest time in the female teams section but unfortunately were disqualified on a technicality. One of their team was wearing a walkman during the event which is contrary to Triathlon Australia rules for safety reasons so therefore another team was elevated to third in the female teams category.

What was bad luck for one local team was fortunate for another team of locals the Carpells. Stacey Gall (41.39 swim), Amy Carpenter (2.53.46 cycle) and Zoe Carpenter(

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2.11.09 run) were elevated to third place and were therefore the only local team to officially place in their category.

Stacey Gall's husband Harl, and teammates Daniel Gall and Luke Fritz had named their team the "Stacey Beaters", living up to the pre race hype by downing the girls with a combined total time of 5.34.35, some twelve minutes ahead of his "better halves" team. No doubt Harl will be paying dearly over the coming weeks.

Another local team of swimmer Dave Gladman, cyclist Stewart Brotherton and runner Drew Fox (newly appointed Triathlon club treasurer) competed in the open male category with a combined time of 5.14.20, eight minutes behind Bailey, Dawson & Dawson. The fastest local swim of the day went to Dave Gladman with time of 40.04, while Jeremy Dawson clocked 2.34.57 to be quickest on the bike and a time of 1.50.50 gave team member & brother Josh the fastest local run split.

Local individuals competitors included school teacher Ben Cox and Aussie Pizza owner Michael (the white rabbit) Anderson. Ben completed the course in a time 6.10.51 in 22nd in his category and 218th overall while Michael finished in 5.52.32, 31st in his category and 204th overall. Another "almost" local competitor was Dalby's Don Cramer, one of several partners in the events major sponsors Diesel Care. Don completed the course in a time of 6.09.52 just one spot ahead of Ben.

While the winners were already relaxing in the recovery area many other competitors were still battling the rising temperatures and the hot as hell 20k run with the last finisher crossing the line just after midday some 7hrs after race start. With temperatures reaching almost 39 degrees later in the morning the 2006 HELL OF THE WEST will long be remembered as one of the hottest and toughest races in the events 16 year history.