

NATIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE CHAMPIONSHIPS 2010

Pippingford Estate

Race Report

By Carla Haines U23

It was finally here! One of the biggest races of the season had come around so fast. I was feeling nervous and excited and also quite confident. I had some really good quality training and racing leading up to the event so I knew I had a good chance of top 3.

Arriving on Saturday afternoon at a reasonable time, I pre rode the course. It was all rideable apart from one section, which took me a while to get the hang of.

Sunday race day, I pre rode the course again early in the morning so I could refresh my mind and go over any last minute bits I wasn't sure about. Everything went smoothly and then chilled out until my race which was later on that afternoon.

For this event I was racing in the U23 female category. I was in a chance for a podium..but I didn't want to get too overconfident about it. Our gridding time was 14:15 and was the last category to go off.

My preparation was good, all my bottles were ready with gels also. We had confirmation that we were doing 4 laps, as there was a debate whether we were going to be doing 5.

I had a really good warm up and was feeling pretty fresh and raring to go. The elite men and U23 men were getting gridded before us so I rode around just to keep my legs moving.

As it was our time to get gridded, my nerves and adrenaline was kicking in. I breathed deeply and kept as calm and as focussed as possible.

The whistle was blown and off we went. I had an amazing start and was up by the leaders (Lily Matthews) wheel. As the start was uphill and very bumpy it was quite hard but I hung on for as long as possible. My team mate Jessie Roberts passed me so then hooked on to her wheel and stayed up with her. Just before a technical section I passed her and made a slight gap.

When coming up the long grass bumpy climb I was in 2nd position and only a minute and a half down from the leader. I just kept going as strong as I could and not let my confidence over ride me. On a fast single track section my front tyre punctured which then caused me to crash quite badly; I had already bruised my knee the week before in a race and I caught it when I hit the ground which was very painful. I had knocked myself out slightly as I was a bit light headed when I was fixing my tyre. The other riders had past me at this point. I didn't panic as I know it wouldn't get me anywhere so I just concentrated on changing the tube. Unfortunately my CO2 canister ran out and didn't have anything else to pump my tyre up with so I had to run down all the single track section before I was anywhere near the 2nd tech zone.

On one part of the course it loops round and then comes back on itself so I could see the other riders on the other side. I thought if I crossed the tape it wouldn't matter and carried on running to the tech zone. There was a marshall there who took my number. I got to the 2nd tech zone where I pumped up my tyre. I carried on riding for the rest of the lap.

Just before the bottom of the climb I had seen my coach. I stopped and had a chat with him to let him know what happened as I was still a bit dizzy. He really encouraged me and I got this surge of adrenaline and pushed on up the climb. If he wasn't there I may have given up which is the last thing I wanted to do!

I was 4 minutes down from 4th. I had 2 more laps to gain time, which is exactly what I did. On to my last and final lap I ploughed up the field passed 4th and shot off down the single track. I making up as much time as possible and really going for it to see how much time I could make up.

I caught up with an elite rider who I sat with up the final climb and sprinted passed her to the finish.

I went off to find space and let all my emotions out. I was angry upset and really annoyed at what happened but theres nothing I could do.

My team manager came over to me to calm me down and explain what happened; because 3rd position had already competed in the New Zealand National champs, she was not eligible for a position...so I got the bronze!!.. Well..thats what I thought until bad news really hit me. One of the commissaires asked me if I ran around the whole course to the tech zone or cross the tape..so in honesty I told him what happened...which lead to a disqualification! I was so upset..all the training and effort I had put in to that race was taken away from me just from one stupid mistake.!

However my performance was outstanding and I was on such great form the whole race which did cheer me up. The winner (Lily Matthew) a GB rider was only, on average, a minute and a half faster than me. Finding this out did make my day.

In my mind I have that bronze medal..although it could have been silver or even the national champs jersey!

There is a lot I could change in that race...but not my performance as it was the best I have ever rode.

To top it all, I got Liam Killeen (2010 Elite mens national champion and former GB Pro Rider) to sign my plaque I won at one of the southern series ☺

Thanks to the Team and Mike our mechanic for all the support and hard work they put in to make it a great weekend.

Next year will be a different story and I will definitely be on that podium...for sure!