

Two Days of Bedford - Women's International Stage Race

The Bedford 2-day saw the WCRA fielding a team consisting of 4 junior riders – Gabs Coates, Alice Monger-Godfrey, Amy Thompson & Emma Trott. The team's aims were mixed with Amy and Gabs recovering from injuries whilst Alice and Emma were looking for either overall or stage results.

The race was won by Hege Linn Eie-Valtand - Team Tubanters Ladies Cycling in terrible conditions when rain fell heavily after a long dry spell; starting the final stage in 4th place overall, 14 seconds behind Pippa Handley - Edinburgh RC, Hege and her team set about cancelling this deficit by targeting the bonus seconds on offer at the Hill Competition and Sprint Competition so that by the end of the stage race she had finished top of the General Classification by 12 seconds.

Stage 1

A 9.7 kilometre team time trial opened the race, with each team being preceded by a motorbike. As expected the WCRA team didn't fair too well but Emma powered the team to a reasonable result as Alice nursed the injured riders as best she could. Surprisingly Team Luciano/Everest and Team Tubanters recorded exactly the same time - 12 mins 58 seconds with Fatbirds CC in 3rd place by 13 seconds; the Dutch team sportingly allowed Team Luciano to hold the leader's Yellow Jersey in the next stage.

Stage 2

After a lunch break the field faced 80 kilometres around the Keysoe circuit with the leading riders expecting to set up their chances on a less demanding course than would face them on the final stage. The WCRA team plan was for Emma to chase the time bonuses available whilst Alice would target the stage win.

A fast start saw some of the less able riders struggling and again the Sprint competition and Hill Competition provided the main action with their bonus seconds on offer. Then, with less than 2 laps of the race to go, Pippa Handley - Edinburgh RC - raced to the front and took off using her time trial skill to open a large gap.

She stretched out her lead to well over a minute despite the combined efforts of the top teams to get her back and into the final lap each time check saw her losing just a few seconds but she held out for a tremendous win with 23 seconds in hand before the main bunch came thundering up the short incline at Keysoe where Alice took 2nd place for the WCRA team, with Jessica Allen - Pinarello-Fatbirds in 3rd place 2 seconds back.

Overall the leader was now Pippa Handley of course and her Edinburgh team would have to be concentrating on team tactics to take the vital bonus seconds on the final stage for her to hold the lead.

Stage 3

Held at the famous Millbrook Vehicle Testing circuit where such television programmes as 'Top Gear' are filmed, this would be the toughest stage the riders would face with its short hard climbs each 9 kilometre lap. The WCRA team followed a similar plan to the previous stage - with Amy feeling a bit better and able to help Emma with her points chase.

Immediately on the first climb it was the Dutch team who set about wiping out the time deficient for their best placed rider Hege. Her team mate Ester Olthuis battled Emma for the points and time bonuses on each climb to ensure the time bonuses were taken away from those riders who were in contention for GC placings.

The race split into 3 groups as the tough conditions took their toll with 21 riders in the lead group. In the final sprint Emma lead out Alice who easily took the stage win for the WCRA team, with Pippa Handley in 2nd place and Louise Mahe - Team Q.C.P claiming 3rd place in the same time of 2 hours 9 minutes 15 seconds.

Overall the race saw a fine display by all 4 of the juniors in the WCRA team but, personally, I feel that the shine was taken from their performances on the last stage due to the lack of facilities provided. Instead of being able to celebrate a stage win and a great team performance with everyone they were forced to hide from the weather in the back of a van – something that I thought we'd seen the end of many years ago. A great race, great performances all round but let down by a lack of facilities compounded by the weather.