



## **Bull of Africa – 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> August 2008**

**(McCain Adventure Addicts: Graham Bird, Tatum Prins, Hanno Smit, Andre Gie)**

### **From Hero's to Zero's with one Punch!!**

*Written by Graham Bird*

It has now been almost two weeks since the Bull of Africa. It has been a time of rest, recovery, refueling and most importantly reflection. As with all sports and all sports people, once the goal or focused event has been achieved or complete, the majority go into a period of withdrawal and post event blues!



In Adventure Racing this is no different, it is possibly even more pronounced. Not because Adventure Racers are sad or disappointed, but rather because they are happy and content in their achievement and need time to take in the enormity of their achievements. Generally when any Adventure Racer finishes an expedition race, they are in a state of sleep deprivation and extreme exhaustion. It takes a few days to begin to function and think normally again. This is when the Adventure Racer starts to enjoy and realize the huge achievement that they have achieved, regardless of where in the field they finished or how much of the course they have completed. To all it is just the satisfaction of having pushed one's self to the limits and beyond, enjoying the wonderful outdoors while doing it.

So this past week of "blues", since completing the Bull, has been one of serious reflection for me. On the one hand, we the McCain Adventure Addicts had an absolutely perfect race and on the other, we suffered a huge disappointment a day after completing when I realized we had fail to clip a CP as we had stopped to pass through a gate just next to the CP.

The race started on Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> August with 168 competitors in 42 teams setting off from the Katberg Golf Estate (just outside Seymour in the Eastern Cape) with a trail run. The course then headed eastward on the Mountain bikes to Hogsback, with a small paddling section at



Seymour Dam. As the sun was setting on the first day, we headed out of Hogsback on foot for the first epic stage of the race, a 60km hike through the Amotale mountains, finishing at the historical village of Old Thomas River, just after sunrise on the second day after a very chilly night on the ridgeline. The wind pushing temperatures below freezing. This hike proved decisive, with the top three SA teams making a break from the chasing international teams. We were one of these teams and ended up spending the majority of the following two days with team uge.cyanosis chasing fellow SA team USN. From Old Thomas River, it was then back onto the bikes, continuing our eastward journey to a hunting lodge above the Kubusi River, again stopping off for a paddling leg at Wriggleswade Dam. We then headed out on foot again for another epic hiking leg, through the Kubusi and Kei River Valleys, with a monster jumar section, before

finishing at a lodge. We did the majority of this hike through the 3<sup>rd</sup> day and suffered with the scorching heat. It was then back onto our bikes to continue the eastward journey, now through Transkei and onto the Coast at Mazeppa Bay, with a naked bike swim through the Kei River and the some awesome hospitality from a store owner deep in rural Transkei. We arrived at Mazeppa Bay on the morning of the fourth day, just minutes after uge.cyanosis, still chasing Team USN. The race then headed southwards along the coast with a 30km beach hike to Seagulls Hotel, before again mounting our bikes for the final push to Cintsa for the finish. This last bike leg saw us stopping off for a ropework section, a small hike in a game reserve before a 4km paddle to the coast for the final beach hike to the end.

We had a brilliant race up to Seagulls. We got into our rhythm early on the first day and stuck to our race plan throughout. We paced ourselves well and had very little issues with the sleep monster, with two very good sleeps, one on the second night at the hunting lodge and one on the third night at the trading store. The navigation was good with no major problems throughout the race. At Seagulls we heard that uge.cyanosis had withdrawn leaving us alone in second position, about four hours behind USN, with the Swedish team Bjurfors a few hours behind us. We were heading into the fourth night and by our calculations we had approximately 15 – 18 hours to the finish. In retrospect, I think this is where we made a huge mistake. Instead of focusing on the team in



front of us, as we had been doing, we started worrying about the team behind us. We decided to push through the night without sleep thinking we could last to the finish. We got progressively slower and started stopping unnecessarily. We also battled to locate a simple CP on the edge of a lagoon. All the time we kept thinking that Bjurfors would catch us. When we hit CP45, my tiredness showed up. Throughout the race we had had to collect various CP's, some we had to punch on our CP card and others we had to collect a code. On the instructions we received a code to get us through an automated gate just next to CP45. We got there, I entered the code, the gate opened and off we cycled, me thinking we had successfully passed the CP. Schoolboy error. Sleep deprivation and tiredness coming through? Lack of Concentration? Who knows. Costly mistake.



We enjoyed the Bull course. It was challenging in all respects, physically, strategically and navigationally. There were tough legs and a few easier legs. There was some unnecessary hike a bike sections. We felt that more could have been done with the paddling legs. The Kei River looked like the ideal spot to put in an epic paddling leg, something the race lacked. We are still trying to understand the point of the last CP just a few km's from the end, taking us up a garbage, faeces infested dune to collect a CP served no purpose and tainted the memory as we crossed the line.



We crossed the finished line in second position, just after 16h00 on Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> August after approximately 500km's and 103 hours of racing, 6 hours behind winners Team USN. We were ecstatic with our race result and happy that we had managed to beat the international teams. It was only on Friday morning when

collecting all the codes and reviewing the CP card to hand in to the Race Director that I noticed that CP45 was not punched. We then headed to the Race Director and let him know of our problem. After an agonizing few hours, he visited us to tell us that he had to apply the race

rules and penalize us. This meant that we would be classified after all official long course finishers, effectively putting us in twelfth position.

Harsh rule? That's something for debate. We gained a few minutes advantage by not walking the 50 odd meters to clip the point when passing through the gate, but in the end suffered an almost 65 hour penalty. The rule was applied as per the briefing and we could not argue or complain about the rule as it had been agreed at the briefing. If we had disagreed with the rule, we needed to have complained or argued before the start. I think the intention of the ruling at briefing was to stop teams deliberately taking a shortcut or an out of bounds road. Ultimately, in the eyes of the organisation, we missed a CP and effectively did not complete the course. We understood and respected the race director's penalty though bitterly disappointed. Could the race director have used his discretion, as per the written rules, possibly?

During each leg on the race we collected various CP's (some code, some punch) before getting to the next transition area. At all of these TA's our CP card was never checked and we were never asked for the codes collected. Even at the finish we were not asked for our CP card or codes. We were merely asked to



hand these in once we had sorted ourselves out, in our case two days after finishing. Had the cards been checked or codes collected at all the TA's to check that teams were on the correct route from the start, we would have noticed this issue earlier and been able / given the opportunity to rectify the problem. What was stopping a team who had forgotten or lost a code at one of the coded CP's from getting the code from another team or claiming that they lost it? Nothing. Did this happen? Who knows. Is this any different to our situation? No. The GPS tracking shows we were at the point. Are we just whining? Possibly. Should we appeal? Would it get us anywhere? Who knows.

In our minds we still had an awesome race, finishing in the top three and racing for the race win. We achieved our goals and gained the much need experience against the international teams. We will now head to the Adventure Racing World Championships at Ecomotion in Brazil at the end of October with renewed confidence.

To my team mates: G-man, Hobbit, and Smelly, you were brilliant and raced fantastically, well done. To our sponsors, thanks for all the support that got us to the start line in fine form.

The McCain Adventure Addicts wish to thank the following team sponsors who support our adventurous lifestyles:

- McCain - For supporting our active lifestyles
- Capestorm - For supplying the apparel to get us comfortably through the race.
- PVM - For providing us with nutritional products to keep us going.
- Black Diamond - For Icon and Cosmo head torches that lit our way brilliantly
- Giant Bicycles - For providing the team with exceptional Anthem MTB's
- Island Tribe - For protecting us from the harsh African sun.
- Squirt - For keeping our Bikes lubed and operating smoothly!

### Hanno Smit's Report:

Team McCain Adventure Addicts planned the 2008 racing calendar around 4 races. These being the Uge.Cyanosis race in Harrismith, the Swazi Xtreme, Bull of Africa and climaxing with the Ecomotion in Brazil, which is also the world champs this year.



The Bull was going to be a very important and pivotal race to the team as it would be the one and only race to test us over this distance for our main goal of the year; the Ecomotion.

We raced hard from the gun, constantly rubbing shoulders with the fancied teams and still kept the pace within our desired envelope. Team USN systematically freed themselves from ourselves, Uge.Cyanosis, Lafuma (France), Buff/Coolmax (Spain) and Bjurfors (Sweden), with an hour's buffer.

The first night brought with it a wind chill that forced us to traverse in a manner determined by the weather conditions rather than keeping an eye on our race opposition. We found ourselves moving at the same pace as team Uge.Cyanosis and built up a symbiotic racing alliance. On days 2 and 3 we continued with this phase of racing with Cyanosis, neither

team able to snap that bungee between the two teams. It was only on the third day as we reached the shoreline that Cyanosis showed signs of slowing down. The reason being a sick member of their team and subsequently they withdrew, leaving us with Bjurfors chasing us as well as second place, a comfortable 3 hours back.

At this stage of the race we had banked a two hour sleep on the second night as well as another two hour sleep on the third night and felt comfortable enough to race our last night

without sleep. It was at this stage of our race, dealing with tricky navigation and having that uncertainty of having found the correct Check Point without a clip and moving on in an exhausted state, that saw our team stutter.

Deciding on a 25min. sleep on the fourth night did save the situation, but whether it was enough to see us home will remain to be a debate.

The fourth day had us sweltering in the heat and tested us more than the previous days. Concentrating on self preservation took the focus off the route and the essential PC's. It was in these dying hours before the finish line, where we moved through an electronically controlled gate, that we forgot to punch a CP located next to the road.

We crossed the line after 4 days and 7 hours behind the convincing USN and about 3 hours in front of Bjurfors, happy and jubilant and unaware of our falter en-route, which would eventually cost us our second position.

A devastating blow after racing so hard for so long. I found relief in the form of my new-born son the next morning and left for home and my son. The rest of the team had to find something that would justify their efforts in this race.

We all did find what we wanted to achieve with the Bull from the outset: we wanted to race hard and to know that we can achieve our goals that we set ourselves, and that we did.

