



## Royal Experience Swazi Extreme - 1 to 4 May 2008

*(McCain Adventure Fanatics: Jeanette Walder, Cas van Aardenne, Ryan Hodierne & Garren Soutar Super seconds: Louis Mulder, Jenni Soutar)*  
*Written by Ryan Hodierne*

The time for SX 2008 had finally arrived, possibly the most anticipated race on the AR calendar each year. McCain entered 2 competitive teams for this year's race & we were all to stay over at Tweet & Bubbles place on the Wednesday night before an early trip to Swaziland the next morning. How festive it was having all the crazy McCain's in one house, full of excitement & loaded with energy, seconds & all!!

The joyful Fanatics team for this year's race consisted of Bubbles the Chuck Norris taming "Super Granny", who lived her

reputation down fence hopping this round (not enough fences to climb), rather the descending queen this time, Garren Soutar, the spot on navigator who's always up for a laugh even when the going is beyond tough, Cas van Aardenne, a new recruit & assistant navigator/pathfinder/work-horse who is chatty as ever & always able to keep our spirits up, especially when chatting to the locals, & then me, the now cripple team member who cant distinguish his calves from his ankles.

After early morning packing & some last minute kit checks, we were off in convoy to the land of WAY more than a thousand hills! The Swazi border was the usual queuing affair, (not that I know??) & once our passports had been stamped, we headed for the town of Sidvokodvo, just south off Mbabane, to the "Biker Bar" which marked the start & finish venue for this years Royal Experience. There were in the region of 40+ courageous teams who had made it to the start line, with a whole whack of competitive adventurers including the Salomon Pro's, Uge. Cyanosis, Kinetic, D4 Productions and Olympus... the McCain's had their hands full for this one.

On Thursday evening, we were treated to a great meal prior to a lengthy race briefing from Darren Raw - "The Ruthless One", with many of us excited about the new race format, being points based with a set race time of 54hrs!!

A 5am start on Friday morning 2 May, saw teams head off into the Swazi darkness for a fast paced orienteering like run through some crops & over a golf course collecting both compulsory & optional points for that leg. The race format provided plenty of confusion & concern, as the front teams were surrounded by the back markers & Sport competitors at many a stage, confusing front teams as to whether they were in the lead or not. Toward the end of this first stage, we had our first refreshing river crossing; this was to prepare us for the many crossings to come, the rivers were flowing furiously in the area.

For the next leg we were on our bikes for a short stretch to T2, where we packed in some grub & headed for the mountains for the toughest hike leg in the race. This hike leg had team's boulder hopping (rather climbing) for a great deal in a rock garden, as teams emerged, there were scratched bellies, bleeding hands & tired legs, all prior to an almost vertical climb to T3, what fun!? This transition was merely a refreshment stop, as it wasn't long before we were back on our feet for the next hiking/running stretch over a few more mountains to T4. At this stage we were placed 4th in the Pro race, with Kinetic & D4 productions hot on our heels.

The next bike leg provided a bit of confusion for the Fanatics, we shot off in a few wrong directions before getting back on track & in the right direction. We were treated to some of the most radical downhill's in this years race, during this leg we headed down one hill for approximately 8km, descending with an average of around 50km/h, the Descending Queen leading the way, then back to the hills it was to T5. Knowing we were to be in T6 by 6pm, we pushed incredibly hard through a dry ravine & up over a kloof to a flattish section where we ran our butts off to make it with 5 minutes to spare, so no points deducted.

We gathered our thoughts for 30minutes or so, donned on some warm kit & set out for a circular, wet & hilly hike for the night. The longest hike in this years race it was for sure, it included some serious bush bashing, loads of chilly river crossings & the longest steep hill I have ever walked up, (Sani Pass matching), which we were to descend down that morning on our bikes, yeeha! We collected a few optional points on this leg, & missed 3, this took us out of contention for the time being. We got into T7 with 2.30hrs to spare, just enough time for a little team cuddle & some shut eye before a 6am start.

What a struggle it was to get out of our warm sleeping bags that morning, weather was chilly & the legs had become non-functional beam poles. It was fascinating to see which teams had made it to the start that morning, by this time a number of teams had found the going & terrain real tough and had struggled to make the cut-off or had pulled out already. A quick bike leg down the hair raising climb we had hiked up that evening lead us into the unassisted bike drop transition where we got our hiking shoes on for a steep descent to the river valley below. At this time, we had joined up with the other McCain's & were pushing hard together, we opted for one of the optional points on this stretch, which ended up being one serious detour around some massive hills & across some rough terrain. The sleep monsters had begun their magic on us at this stage & the pain was starting to set in. Fortunately, to break the monotony, we were faced by a radical ropes section that included a bit



of team work, clambering up boulders, an awesome 100m or so traverse from one peak to another, after which we abseiled down a sheer 50m+ rock face. One member of each team had to Jumar back up the climb then abseil back down the other side again, adding a bit of variation to the norm, making this one hectic ropes section...Great stuff guys!! After the ropes, we shot up a spectacular kloof into T9 to grab our bikes once again.

This bike leg saw us joining up with the Addicts & team Salomon Pro for the majority of the ride, quite an honour. A few optional points on this stretch had us running up off-track rocky outcrops & radio tower hills before we got into T10 with little time to spare & kick up our feet. At 6pm sharp we headed back out into the darkness on our trusty steeds once again for a quick cycle to a bike drop where we quickly gathered our thoughts for the next hike leg, +-14km which seemed never ending. It was an honour once again to join up with the Addicts & Salomon Pro for this energy sapping hike. As we approached a towering mountain, we were warned that evening that it was imperative we find the path up... and, convinced we were on the right path, we continued to the point of no turning back. This is where the bush bashing began, 12 team members pushing & bashing their way through & eventually making it to the run down kraal on top. I can assure you there are 2 paths up that mountain now! The mist started pulling in & the temperature dropped suddenly, the 3 teams separated & the pace picked up as everyone was eager to get in to T12 as early as possible that morning for some much needed sleep. We entered T12 with 3 hours to spare, filled our tums with some warm pasta & hopped into the tent for a quick snooze, thick mist & howling wind outside.

We woke up that morning for the final day of racing, yay we had made it!! The cut-off for the final day was 11h00, so it was to be a quickish stretch home to the finish. An optional rafting leg was included on the final day, with only the 2 front teams braving the cold waters. We opted against this option as we had our sights set on collecting all the optional points on the bike leg and stay on our bikes to the finish, as cycling was our strength. After some tricky but smooth navigation, we pushed as hard as ever to finish in the nick of time, seconds to spare!

We ended 4th overall, only a few points behind the Addicts •, with Salomon Pro a tight second, with 1 point separating them from the flawless team Uge. Cyanosis who missed only 1 point for the entire route, amazing stuff guys, wow!

Once again I am blown away by yet another spectacular Swazi Xtreme, they just seem to get better each year. All our thanks to Darren, Lisa & their team for the most amazing race & for crippling us, what an experience.

Our thanks go out to our seconds, Louis Mulder & Jenni Soutar who treated us to some lovely warm meals that kept us smiling with full tummies, they were our bike mechanics, our alarm clocks and kept things running smoothly throughout the race, thanks guys. If it weren't for you we would probably still be out there.

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

- McCain - For supporting our active lifestyles
- 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!