



Trans Baviaans Mountain Bike Marathon - 230km - 24 Hours

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By James Lea-Cox

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The McCain Adventure Addicts headed down to the Eastern Cape in late August for the annual Trans Baviaans Mountain Bike Marathon. The Trans Baviaans is considered to be the longest one day mountain bike race in the world



and it delivers big time. Basically you hop on your bike in the one horse town of Willowmore and head down and through the spectacular Baviaanskloof till you reach Jeffrey's Bay 230km later and within the 24 hour cut-off time. The route is not marked so the teams consisting of two to four riders are issued with route books and required to pass through various checkpoints along the course. The McCain Adventure Addicts entered two teams for this event. A male trio of Graham "Tweet" Bird, James Lea-Cox and Stuart Rawlinson and a mixed pair of Rob McGloughlin and Alice "Pies" Rawlinson.

The Addicts flew down to PE on the Friday evening and then hired what Tweet claimed to be a Ferrari for a 3 hour drive to a farmhouse just outside Willowmore. The Rawlinson's avoided this road trip by reasoning that they had family commitments elsewhere. After numerous near death encounters with prancing kudu's and smaller antelope the trio arrived at a typical karoo farmhouse together with quite a few animals trophies adjoining the walls. Nevertheless, we slept well that night except for Rob who was kept awake by a snoring farmer.

We woke to wisps of mist and visibility at 20 meters. So much for the weather forecast! The weather cleared, as we drove into Willowmore, dodging the town pipe band, to meet the rest of the team and our support crew, Sue and Pod. The race was to start at 10 am so we rushed around in a frenzy trying to sort out what kit to pack and ensuring that our bikes were in working order. All seemed to be going well until Pies realised that her front fork had seized 5 minutes before the start. The promise of 230 km without a working fork was not exactly appetising and I was very glad it was not me!

With a few minutes to go the Addicts lined up on the start line. The first thing we noticed was that we had the biggest packs on our backs. All we saw were tiny camelbacks and a few disturbed individuals with only one or two water bottles and a pump! Here we were entering a mountain bike race with adventure racing kit. Oh well, if anyone asks, it's for extra training. And we were asked, numerous times - usually along the lines of "are you carrying a tent?"

The whole town had arrived at the start and when the gun went the crowd went wild. While the Mayor shouted out his own personal rendition of good luck, the Addicts trio quickly pushed their way to the front for the first tar section until the district road. At one stage Stu was in the front trying to fend off a local on a postman's bike but the racing snakes quickly dropped us, and the local, and we resided ourselves to the first bunch. The pace on the first 50km is crazy. We were averaging above 30 km/h and regularly cruising along in the mid 40's. The legs weren't happy though and we were desperately hoping that they would get a move on and warm up! Stu was shaking his head; I was grinning and bearing it, and Tweet? Well Tweet claimed he was feeling strong like mother Russia and then stopped to take a photograph. Just before the 1st checkpoint Stu dropped a chain, which resulted in a twisted link. Luckily there was a mechanic at CP 1 who sorted it out really quickly, thus preventing any delays. After leaving the CP, the legs started to work again, but unfortunately Stu's head was still doing some game watching on both sides of the tracks. Quite sure I heard "my legs are like lead" more than once!



The route progressed down hill at top pace through the Baviaanskloof and enthralled us all at every turn as the scenery became increasingly magnificent. We were starting to get the hang of this thing called mountain bike and started catching bunches and moving up the pack. We checked into CP2 in 21st place overall and after a quick refuel headed up and over the Baviaans Back to CP 3. CP 3 was located off the main route and signposted with some chevron tape. I understand a few teams missed it including the McCain Addicts mixed team of Rob and Pies. All I can say is refer to your route book! We had ensured that our bike lights and warm kit was delivered to this checkpoint so we stopped for longer than normal to stock up. We even had a muffin or two.



From CP3 the climbing began. First we had the Fangs, which were not too bad and hardly worth complaining about. But then we got to the M.A.C. The Mother of All Climbs. Funny how all suffer fests

seem to have the prefix:

Mother. This climb never stopped as it wound its way up the mountain side to CP 4 on the plateau. Mark Le Roux of Big Shot Media thought this was a great spot to drive up beside you, thrust a camera in your face and asks “how are you feeling?” Well when you are sweating bullets and cursing the fact that your granny gear does not have a Mother (only case were Mother is used to describe something easier), you struggle to be civil and talk in broken sentences. Three to four words in between large breaths is all you can usually get out.

We surmounted the M.A.C and caught up with Adrian Saffy of Team Stirling who was looking far from fresh. Tweet insisted that he take some Energy Dynamics Protein Blast and by the time Stu arrived old Adrian was on top of the world again. The buggers even passed us when we left CP4. The route from CP4 descended the aptly put Big Dipper. Some of the bends had shear drops and were indicated by a measly piece of chevron tape. Luckily no brakes failed on the descent! The Addicts increased the pace somewhat until we reached the first supported checkpoint, CP 5. Here we met Sue and Pod who fed us some delicious soup and chicken pieces. We did not stay long as we wanted to get some distance under our belts before darkness fell.

The Addicts left CP5 in 10th place overall and were joined by a lone cyclist called Gavin whose team mate had dropped out of the race. The route progressed onto the tar road before a turn to Humansdorp and the start of the Never Ender Hill. It lived up to its name. Just when you think you are at the top and about to enjoy a descent another uphill presents itself. And this happened a lot. Halfway through the Never Ender Tweet had a puncture. Somehow it would not seal despite a healthy amount of Stan’s pooling on the road. Luckily Tweet had a mini tyre repair kit and plugged the hole. A quick spin of the wheel and we were on our way.

After some relatively flat road we reached a Y-Junction. This would not have been a problem had we not lost our route book just after the last CP! And so we looked to Gavin who had done the route before. We headed right but stopped after a while to check whether the bikes lights in the distance followed us. They did not! We raced back to the junction and took the correct turn. After the race we concluded that should we not have had a puncture we would more than likely have continued on the road and ended up way off route!

A short cycle had us at CP 6 where we tucked into some free Pick n Pay refreshments before latching onto a mixed pair for the last 20 or so kilometres. As a group we reached CP 7, which was unmanned and spun the gears up the last short hill of the course. Within no time we were on the tar road heading under the highway. The tar section was short and soon enough the lights of Jeffrey’s Bay presented themselves. With that feeling of the end is nigh we raced through the town and under the finishing arch and into the race marquee. Stu gathered all his reserves which he had been pooling for the day and took the yellow jersey by 2 seconds (the opinions of James and Tweet with regard to this impressive feat shall not be mentioned). The small crowd cheered as we climbed off our bikes with massive grins on our faces and accepted our finishing medal’s. We had completed one damn long race! Now all we had to do was order ourselves a “steak ete”, sit back and await the following teams safe in the knowledge that we would actually get some sleep tonight.

The McCain Addicts trio finished the race in a little over 11 hours placing them in 6th place overall out of 192 teams. The mixed pair unfortunately missed CP 3 and thus did not receive an official finish. They still did incredibly well, despite a seized shock and a lack of bike lights (these were at CP 3), finishing in just over 13 hours.

Sunday was spent enjoying a well received breakfast before heading to the prize giving. Unfortunately we did not make

it to the podium but we still won a top notch Garmin GPS and a Cob Braai in the lucky draw. Think it was the first time we saw old Rob get seriously excited! The weekend ended with a drive back to PE, lunch and an early evening flight to Gauteng.

The McCain Adventure Addicts would care to thank the support crew of Sue and Pod who gave up their Saturday to keep us fed and smiling. A big thank you goes to the team from Ecobound, their sponsors and all the volunteers who staged a really fantastic race.

Lastly McCain Adventure Addicts would care to thank the following team sponsors who support and promote our passion for alternative sport and the great outdoors:

McCain – For supporting our active lifestyles

PVM nutritional products – For providing us with nutritional products to keep us going.

Giant Bicycles - For providing the team with exceptional Anthem mountain bikes

Salomon – For the top class footwear

Island Tribe - For protecting us from the harsh African sun.