

Trailquest – Sunday 4th July 2010

With an extended Bank Holiday weekend and three days to choose from, it seemed a tad unfair that the weather chose not to co-operate only for the Trailquest. On Saturday, when the remainder of the controls were put out, it was dry, sunny and warm. And the same again on Monday when they were all gathered in again.

But on Sunday we were treated to severe gale force winds and squally showers that ripped across the exposed hills. Visibility was down to a few metres and, according to one team, it was like being hosed with a jet-wash! From the event centre in Sulby, it was obvious that we were being treated to the kind of winds more usually associated with late autumn – not early July. Reports came in of riders forced to walk across the fells with their bikes being blown into the air. After months of dry sunny weather – could this really be happening in summer?

Given the state of the weather, the organisers took the decision to extend the start times to allow for a later start. With the winds set to moderate in the afternoon, it was clearly an advantage to set off as late as possible. In fact, when I ventured out after 5pm to start collecting the course, the wind was down to nothing more than a brisk breeze and it was once again clear and sunny on the hills.

The course included a high loop around the flanks of Snaefell, including a section of the Millennium Way. Sections of the national trail are notoriously hard to find and poorly way-marked, never mind in low cloud. So it was a good thing that these sections had been given some extra marker tapes.

On the other side of the Sulby valley, an extended series of checkpoints stretched along the End to End course and Black Mountain almost as far as Brandywell. With the wind from the South West, it was going to be a hard slog across the tops to reach the higher-scoring checkpoints.

Closer to home, there were checkpoints in Ballaugh and Tholt-y-Will plantations as well as a scattering around the lower ground. With the wind being a major factor, the best strategy was clearly to stick to the shelter of the trees for as long as possible and then to try to get the wind behind you on the tops. Not easy given that the event centre was at the northern edge of the course.

In all, 44 riders made up of 17 teams and 10 solos did brave the tough conditions. Of these, 12 teams/solos tackled the 5-hour epic. Julian Corlett, currently enjoying lifetime-best performance and in his final year as a Veteran, put in a predictably tough route to pick up 24 of the 30 available controls. He made the tough choice of tackling the Millennium Way section in what would normally be the harder direction. But this did at least mean that the wind was behind him on the most exposed sections. Despite taking a wrong turn and climbing the wrong set of zig-zags above Tholty, he was the clear winner with a massive 909 points – coming in just 23 seconds late. Just checkout his route on the results pages of the web site.

Dave Rielly & Steve Partington came in an impressive 2nd with 852 points. They were the top team and similarly timed it to perfection with just one and a half minutes to spare. Mark Caley & Gary Hinds were third with 735 points and still looked cheerful despite the battering conditions. Thanks to them for helping with course clearing the following day.....

John Barker was 4th on 719 just 7 minutes late. Neil Helks & Robin Arnold did well on 687 with the team of Stuart Garry and Ben Dunlop (should they count as a generation team?) 6th with 681. Craig Hindle was just 10 points behind on 671 in front of top woman Jackie Lee on 658. Jackie took time out from fell running to do the event whilst partner Lloyd Taggart nipped off to do the fell race – he was clearly tempted to do the 3-Hour event on his return but had probably had seen enough of the hills for one day!

In the 3-Hour event, Rob Sorby was the clear winner with an impressive 662 points with just 2 minutes to spare. Rob would normally have been expected to do the 5-Hour but had other commitments.

Very, very well done to the ladies team of Julie Lyness & Jackie Fletcher for picking up second place overall in the 3-Hour on 393 points, despite incurring 15 time penalty points. Jackie has not been seen on a Mountain Bike for some time so hopefully she enjoyed the challenge – despite the atrocious conditions?

Ian Strodder did well to pick up 3rd place on 324 points followed by Rob Mercer on 303 points. The mixed team of Peter Smith & Janet Corkish were 4th also on 303 points just a minute behind.

John Nippress was forced to retire early after an “off”. He appeared to have cracked a rib and we hope that he will bounce back again soon. Rob & Thomas Longden were our only generation team on this occasion and did well to pick up 111 points.

Unluckiest riders were Tony Glassey & Gary Ashe who, after climbing all the way up Narradale and descending back to Sulby, failed to locate either of the checkpoints en-route. They then punctured as the worst of the squalls blew in and decided to quit – scoring just the 5 points awarded to the finish control. We hope that they are not discouraged and will also have another go.

The checkpoints were all carefully positioned using GPS and no one reported problems with locating them. The only one that did cause problems was the (easy) checkpoint 4 along the old railway track towards Ballaugh. The control itself was wired to an iron post by a pair of gates. The control box was partly concealed in the grass to keep it hidden from the casual passer-by but clearly someone had decided to “tidy-up” the orange marker tape. This helpful act meant that, even standing next to the control, it was difficult to see. Apologies to anyone who did waste time trying to find it – but it was definitely there! All the controls were recovered intact and no technical problems were encountered.

Thanks to the Sulby Commissioners for the hire of their lovely spacious village hall and also to Sue for once again putting on tea & cakes for everyone afterwards.

Once again, everyone deserves a mention but the main thing is that we hope you all enjoyed the event and will give it another go in October. The next event is scheduled for 31st October – venue tbc but hoped to be in the central area.

Full results including category placings, plus a detailed split time analysis of the controls visited, are available on www.results.manxtiming.com

See you all again in October ☺

Graham Hughes