

## 2007 XTERRA DENMARK

The second edition of the Danish XTERRA National Championship had fantastic competition on the sharp end of the field. Both the men's and women's elite racers battled hard and tight in perfect conditions for a fast race. After several days of on and off rain, the day was cool with a slight breeze and partly cloudy but dry.

The swim was altered a bit when a few hundred jellyfish showed up in the Aarhus harbor. Fortunately although several athletes got stung, 99% were wearing wetsuits and nobody was delayed at all. Making his return after 2 years, Spain's "Vito" Henestrosa led the pack out of the water and up the 87 steps to the run for transition. The major men's pack of Ronnie Dietz (Germany), Lieuwe Boonstra (South Africa), Jim Thijs (Belgium) and Knute Hoeler and Sascha Wingefeld (Germany) were all together headed out on the bike. For the women, Sybille Matter (Swiss) put over a minute on Nicole Duggan (GB) and almost two on Eszter Erdelyi (Hungary).

Second year pro Thijs rode the race of his life and battled the veteran Dietz hard. Henestrosa missed a turn while leading "I was concentrating so hard" and came around the first lap in 6<sup>th</sup>, with Boonstra a solid 3<sup>rd</sup>. England's Sam Gardner was flying after a horrible swim, but even with the fastest bike ride of the day he could not overcome losing nearly 3 minutes on the swim.

Thijs and Dietz were together out on the run and Boonstra was soon caught by Henestrosa who made a big comeback on the 2d bike lap. Dietz was measuring his young opponent and put the hammer down on the second run lap to win by just a minute. Lieuwe and Henestrosa started their second run lap just inches apart, but about 2K from the finish the South African put in a kick that Henestrosa could not match. The ageless Swiss Othmar Brugger had a strong race to finish 5<sup>th</sup>.

The women's race was even more exciting. With a big lead out of the water, Matter seemed to have the race in hand. Rikke Kelja (Finland) caught and passed her way into 3<sup>rd</sup> place and Erdelyi was riding hard in 2<sup>nd</sup> after losing nearly 2 minutes in the swim, but Sybille was going just as fast and posted the quickest bike time by just a few seconds. The run was where the Hungarian European Champion (she won the XTERRA European Championship race in Sardinia) expected to make up the time and she did. Eszter made the pass less than 1K from the finish and despite Sybille trying to kick back, held off the Swiss woman to win by a scant 9 seconds. Kelja was alone in 3<sup>rd</sup> and Carina Wasle (Austria) a good fourth after being away from training for 10 weeks. We can look for her to get stronger in the coming weeks. Nicola Duggan paced herself to a well deserved 5<sup>th</sup>.

The overall field for this year increased nicely from 2006. This event is organized beautifully. The course is held in a magnificent national forest where the bike trails are fast and furious and the run is technical and hilly. Just minutes from the Aarhus, second biggest city in Denmark it is a joy to come here. The city has a lot to offer with a river walk full of restaurants and pubs and lots of entertainment. Two airports are less than an hour away with connections to everywhere in Europe. If you want to see Scandinavia, this is a perfect place to start.

XTERRA Denmark race report by Dave Nicholas, President XTERRA Global Tour, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2007.