

## RAIN RAIN GO AWAY repeats in Denmark

The summer of 2006 may be best remembered for rain. In Bakio, Euskadi, Spain there were big storms just a few days ahead of the event and everyone scrambled to get the course safe because of flooding. In Milwaukee, lightning and heavy rains made for a mudbath and epic event. Just this past Saturday, rains also hit the very first XTERRA Denmark Championship.

Denmark is a surprising place. One would think the sea would be cold – but it was 19.5C (70F) and that someone from outside Denmark might have communication problems. Not true. Everyone in Denmark speaks English and many speak German as well. The host city of Aarhus is a very wonderful University town with lots of shops, restaurants and things to do and see. The countryside is rolling hills and great forests. The Danes are outside all the time. It is very usual to see Mom, Dad and kids running together or riding their bikes as a family. Most assuredly a very healthy culture.

As for the race, despite the rain all 3 disciplines took place. The Bay of Aarhus was choppy, but not dangerous at all. A “first” for XTERRA took place when Brit Julie Dibens beat the entire field and was the first person, much less first woman out of the water. She was nearly 3 minutes ahead of the second fastest swimmer Ingrid van Lubek from the Netherlands. Best (or worst) part of the swim is only 10 meters from where you leave the water are 88 steps that must be climbed to get to the trail leading to transition. True, classic XTERRA stuff.

Nico Lebrun was the favorite but Nico does not like waves and came out of the water over 2 minutes behind the leaders Sascha Wingefeld and Ronnie Dietz, both of Germany. The bike course here is fast and fun. Many places wide enough to pass, lots of single track, short climbs, fast downhill, roots, berms and anything you could want. The trails are well established and held up perfectly under the rainy conditions. Years of mulching, leaves, branches, etc have made them very loamy and absorbent so while riders got dirty, they were not covered totally with mud. Current points leader Nico Pfitzenmaier flatted early and rode like an animal to catch up. This took him off his bike and in his own words “I rode so hard I had nothing left for the run”. Nico Pfitz ended up a disappointing 7th.

Lebrun was also flying and passed into the lead early into the second lap. Despite the rain the hardy locals came out to spectate and several hundred lined the course, especially where the bikes were marked and headed out onto their second lap. Ronnie Dietz was having a quick cycle and kept his lead from the swim into T2 in second behind Lebrun. The worries for Ronnie were XTERRA neo pro Fabien Combu Combaluzi from Versailles, France (don't even try to pronounce it). Fabien was brought into XTERRA by the successes of Lebrun and Sylvain Dodet and now must be considered a contender for a win. He cut into Dietz's lead and trailed the German closely going out onto the run, but he, like Pfitzenmaier had put it all out on the bike and slowly dropped behind Ronnie still held a solid third place in only his second XTERRA. The race for 4th through 6th was terrific. South Africa's Liuwe Boonstra held it most of the afternoon, but Czech Jan Kubicek and German Sascha Wingefeld never let him rest for a minute. A total of 19 seconds separated 4th from 6th. Watching these three men slosh through the run, slipping downhill and jumping over creeks, etc was magnificent spectating.

Julie Dibens was simply too much for the women's field. She posted the fastest swim, fastest bike and 2d fastest run to win by over 8 minutes. Ingrid van Lubek kept her place from the swim for a great 2nd place. Carina Wasle from Austria had bike problems but ran her way into 3rd and another podium bringing her to a record of two seconds and a third in her first three races this season.

The first Danish XTERRA is now in the books. Everything the organizers did was first class. Everything started right on time, communications with athletes was superb. Nobody, but nobody got lost on either the bike or run as they were perfectly marked with red and blue arrows and miles of yellow tape hanging from branch's.

If you are looking for Nordic efficiency and precision, combined with stunning forests, a great city, the ocean and friendly folks, this is the place to be. My guess is that with some decent weather, we will have thousands of spectators at this event next year as the park is just minutes from the center of town and heavily used by residents. Good hotels are very nearby ranging from hostels to 4 star. There is a wonderful camp ground just a few hundred meters from the finish line that rent neat cabins. The airport at Billund is just an easy hour away with lots of flights from everywhere in Europe. Not much more to say other than we just added another reason to Live More.

XTERRA Denmark race report by Dave Nicholas, President XTERRA Global Tour, published in the XTERRA News Letter 16th August 2006.