

## 2010 DT Swiss Mountains to Beach is a 5 day stage race – Felt/Redshift racing

by Andy Blair

The DT Swiss Mountains to Beach is a 5 day stage race; held over 385km from the roof of Australia at Thredbo to the NSW Sapphire Coast. Representing Redshift Racing at the 2010 event was myself and my team mate Nick Both. Looking back at the 6 race stages, I am content that we did everything we could to take control of the race, but once again the overall win has eluded me and I will have to be happy with 2<sup>nd</sup> place.

On day one, it was tough to extract myself from my cosy bed in the Thredbo Alpine Hotel for the freezing chairlift ride up to Eagle's Nest. The race started with a 12km individual time trial from the top of Thredbo ski resort down to the village. This year's longer course and addition of a large climb did not seem to suit me so well and I wasn't able to repeat my stage win from last year as I came in 2<sup>nd</sup>, giving Jason English an early lead in the general classification. In contrast, the afternoon stage at Lake Crackenback went exactly to plan with a group of about 6 riders still together going into the final kilometres. I knew that I wanted to be at the front in the last few kilometres, which is primarily single track, so with about 3km to go I launched an attack. From there, all I had to do was defend my position and I was able to cross the line ahead of Andy Fellows and Jason.



Day two was the 80km race stage from Perisher to Buckenderra on the shores of Lake Eucumbene. Over some iconic scenery of Blue Cow and down through Guthega and Island bend, the main group of 5 was all together and everyone seemed to be saving themselves for the big climbs. The day's biggest climb - the 400m ascent up to the Snowy Plains soon whittled the group down to 3 with Nick Menager and Brad Morton dropping off leaving only Jason, Andy Fellows and I in the front. I was feeling like I didn't have terrific legs on this day and it was all I could do to crest the hill on the wheel of Andy and Jason, and hope to recover on the flats. Unfortunately when we hit the next climb of Nimmo Hill, both Andy and I were unable to match Jason's acceleration. Deciding that we were now teammates for the day, Andy and I pushed hard over the top and set off down the other side in hot pursuit. Nimmo Hill is a super fast and fun fire road descent, and Andy and I were hooting at each other all the way down. Unfortunately for Andy he blew out a corner right near the bottom. I hesitated about waiting for him for a while as we would be helpful to each other over the final 25km of open fire road, but I decided to push on as Jason was still down the road and I had to limit my losses. I eventually dragged myself into Buckenderra 6 minutes behind Jason, and Andy was further 4 minutes adrift.

Day three was the relatively short day with only 26km of racing, but it was made tough by the 5:15am race start! The course was 2 laps around a predominately fire road circuit with a few short climbs, and plenty of erosion gullies and sand traps to keep us all on our toes. Smashing around rutted trails in the dark can be daunting, but with my new Radical Lights strapped to my handlebars and helmet, I had more lumens than I knew what to do with, and I was having a ball. I made sure I was always well positioned on or near the front of the main group as there was a high chance that a crash could cause a split in the bunch. It was all going well until the climb at about 5 kilometres when Jason surged and the group exploded. Andy Fellows was the only one to stay with him and I was left on my own to chase. The two of them worked together until Andy attacked to take a well deserved win, Jason was 2<sup>nd</sup> and I was 3<sup>rd</sup>.



After a good nights sleep in my own bed I was ready for the "Verofit Big Day Out"; an 89km marathon from Cooma to Yowrie. Trailing Jason English by 7 minutes and sitting in 2<sup>nd</sup> position on the general classification, this was my last big chance to make any major time gains, so I gambled everything on this stage. At the 29km mark we hit the steep 400m ascent of Numeralla Mountain and it was time for me to attack. I knew it was a very long way to the finish so I did just enough to get a small gap over the top and then worked very hard to build a lead through the following kilometres. This was always going to be tough as the next 25kms were primarily fast open fire road. Jason was behind in the main group chasing with Andy F, but thankfully they didn't have too many allies that were keen to chase me with my team mate, Nick Both, as well as Nick Menager and Brad Morton getting dragged along for the ride. I was pushing hard as I approached the big descent down Conway's Gap thinking I could recover on the 700m plunge from the escarpment down to the Wadbilliga River, but after the recent rain it was quite rough and I found it difficult to rest. With 10km of undulating terrain before the final 300m climb of the day, I started to ease the pace off a little; having smashed through nearly 3 litres of Verofit Electrolyte, it was starting to be a long day and I wanted to have something left for the final climb.



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Meanwhile Nick, who was in a perfect position to capitalise on Andy and Jason's chase, flatted on the way down Conway's Gap and was no longer in contention for the stage. This left English to escape from the front of the chase group and he bridged across to me at the base of the last climb. Feeling far from fresh I was unable to stay with him on the hill and I had to be content with 2<sup>nd</sup> on the stage. I was happy that I had ridden a smart and aggressive race; any other tactic would have resigned me to 2<sup>nd</sup> overall. The gamble didn't pay off, but I didn't leave any questions unanswered.

The final stage from Bermagui to Narooma was always going to be a big ask for me after a long solo breakaway the day before, but Nick was starting to find his legs as the week went on and we felt that we were a good chance at taking the stage. The first 15kms involved a couple of laps around the Bermagui mountain bike park and it was easy to pick who the XC racers were. Nick and I were able to gap the lead group on every descent and make them chase back up the climbs. We left the park with a small advantage and pushed on up the coast to Camel Rock. From here the race was neutralised for 30 minutes in order for us to negotiate the mouth of Wallaga Lake that had opened to the sea due to the recent rains. This was the worst possible timing for us as Jason had just flatted and he wasn't carrying a tube. The 30 minutes of neutral riding allowed him enough time to borrow a tube off someone and fix the flat without losing any time. After the neutral section the bunch of Nick and I, Menager, Jason and Fellows regrouped and Nick and I took turns attacking off the front. When we hit the first beach section we were faced with a creek crossing that came up to our chests. The sand on the other side was super soft and difficult to ride. I would find a hard section for a bit and then suddenly hit a soft section and have to run. Once I got my head around the line choices, my huge 2.25" Maxxis tyres kept me floating on top of the sand, but English now had a gap and for Nick and I the chase was on. He managed to build a small lead which blew out in a moment of confusion when he apparently didn't hear the marshal telling him to walk across a bridge, so he was able to ride a 200m section that everyone else had to walk. From there we weren't able to bridge the gap and ended up finishing a slightly disappointing 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.

One stage win and 2<sup>nd</sup> overall was not quite the result I was hoping for, but I finished the week strongly and the form should be good now going into the Oceania Championships in Dunedin, NZ. For Nick and I, it was our first race on the new Felt Six Team bikes and they worked perfectly. It is the kind of bike on which you can immediately feel comfortable and they were the perfect rig for such a tough stage race.

Special thanks to our soigneur Rosie, who drove for us and cooked our meals. Also a big thanks to Swell Design Group, as well as Thredbo Resort, Felt Bikes, 2XU clothing, KOM Cyclery, Verofit nutrition, Radical Lights and Maxxis tyres for making this week of racing affordable, comfortable, fast, fun, nutritious & illuminating. Of course thanks also to the entire Wildhorizons team for putting on such a wonderful event, it was an especially good effort to sort out a rideable course for the last day considering that mother nature had resulted in the Bega Valley Shire being officially declared a natural disaster zone only 2 weeks prior to the event. I am looking forward to next year's event, it was great this year to catch up with many of the friendly faces that I met at last year's event, as well as meeting plenty of new people. Hopefully they will all be back again next year for the 2011 Mountains to Beach.

Andy Blair

Andy Blair, Nick Both ran the new 2010

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