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E N D U R O C H A L L E N G E

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BC Bike Race 2010

The BC Bike Race is promoted as an epic journey from Vancouver to Whistler – riding the world's best mountain bike trails for the ultimate single track experience. Sure, this could just be marketing spin, but the photos, videos and testimonials on their website suggested that something unique was on offer. My race buddy Garrett and I entered on the strength of this and here's a little of what we experienced.

WORDS BY ALAN VOGT | PHOTOS: DAVE SILVER/BC BIKE RACE

Day Zero: Rego, Briefing and Prologue

500 riders from 22 countries (including 100 women) converged on Inter River Park, North Vancouver to register and attend a race briefing later in the day. Before that was a prologue, a short 3.5km introduction to Vancouver's famous North Shore and a great chance to get the legs moving after the long flight. It was fun, but I was sluggish from lack of sleep... the missed connection from San Francisco to Vancouver made our trip 9 hours longer than it should have been... (more on 'that bloody airline' later).

Rego

The rego procedure was like many I have attended, however, waiting in the queue proved a great opportunity to meet riders, find out where they were from and soak up the building excitement for the week ahead. It was here that I caught up with one of the driving forces behind the event, Olympian, National Champion and three time winner of the Trans Rockies Challenge, Andreas Hestler. Andreas, or "Dre" as he is known, is the Director of Marketing for the race, a top guy and as I learned later would be smashing out some great times with the front runners each day. Once a racer as they say...

Briefing

"You can't see the things that can kill you in Australia, but over here they're big!" As a rider who hasn't ridden trails where there's a chance you could be eaten, I found Brooks Hogya's (BCBR's Senator) explanation of what to do when you meet a black bear or grizzly riveting and hilarious. With the timing and confidence of a stand-up comedian Brooks made sure everyone was listening, and as an experienced wilderness educator and medic, he also knew his stuff. The race briefing was extremely well delivered. We were introduced to the entire BC Bike Race team (including event creator Dean Payne) and received an overview of how the race would unfold each day. We got a sense of their passion and enthusiasm for this unique event. The BC Bike Race would showcase the best riding in each locale, designed by local trail builders who were out to impress us with their trails and perhaps out do the other guys. Bring it on!

Stage 1: Nanaimo.

Rain in Vancouver saw us scrambling for shellwear and thinking our first day of BC singletrack would be slick! The trip to Nanaimo from Vancouver was interesting, firstly on board the many yellow school buses and then a ferry, while listening to the excited chatter between riders from all over the world. We picked out a few Aussie faces and discovered there were more than a few riders from Canberra. Upon arrival in Nanaimo we were greeted with crisp temperatures and the welcome relief that Vancouver Island was rain free today.

Our bikes were racked and waiting at the ferry terminal and we kicked off with an 8km neutral roll through Nanaimo's main streets before leading into the singletrack just outside town. The tracks were flowing but with 500 fresh sets of legs on the first trails of the race, the conga lines got in the way of total enjoyment. That said, there were grabs of open track where we could wind up and get into the flow. Nice.

The course director for Day 1 advised that 'power moves' would be required to negotiate the many technical elements of the trail like rock ups, logs, roots and such. Some were pretty challenging but I

had experienced wheels to follow to help me select good lines. By Aid Station 1, the groups began to thin out and we moved up the field a little and enjoyed fast flowing sections with only occasional waiting.

The back of the course headed out behind Mount Benson which meant long open climbs in the heat, and we managed to gain time on a couple of teams that we had been swapping places with all day. We made the top without cramping, and a guy at the top said it was all



downhill from here making for smiles all round. He wasn't joking, as the track was a good 7km long, flowy, steep, technical and in places just 'hang off the back of the saddle and hope for the best' squirrelly. This section just seemed to go on for ever. These trails were more raw than anything I've ridden before, and a thrilling and arm-achingly fun way to get back down to the finish. It was only Stage 1, and I'd just ridden the best trails ever.

Advice: Sell your house, and move to Nanaimo.

Stage 2: Cumberland.

We travelled from Nanaimo to Cumberland on the faithful yellow school buses. The race start from the local sports oval took us through sleepy streets before heading off road. A real delight early on was Bear Bait, a beautifully smooth flowing track that rode like melted butter with the occasional bridge or log stack to keep you from going into a dream state. Some short gravel and tar sections gave way to the first long (10km) grind up logging roads to reach Aid Station 1 where we hooked into the serious amounts of food and drink on offer before launching down long, thrilling, technical singletrack that was downright scary in spots. Steep with lots of rocky drops and roots, it's the sort of stuff I never ride at home. I sucked it up, took on the challenge and was surprised that the decision to take it on, rather than walk it resulted in making it with ease (most of the time) and then onto the next challenge.

The descents were so long that my arms and hands were aching from constant braking and the upper body effort required to stay online and upright. I didn't expect this. After this long descent and a killer arm pump we unloaded onto a blue metal side road and traversed a while before launching into yet more rooty singletrack with lots of logs, bridgework and technical features. We rode our first long logs and big bridges that in places were quite high off the ground. There weren't alternatives - just consequences - so we rode them.

queue for a (cold) shower took the shine off a big day on dirt. A truly great place to ride.

Reflecting back on this stage prompts me to offer some advice: sell your house, and move to Cumberland.

Day 3: Powell River.

Another yellow bus trip and ferry ride delivered us from Vancouver Island to the town of Powell River on BC's Sunshine Coast. A short walk took us to Willingdon Beach Park and the start of Day 3. It would also be our campsite for the night. The sun was shining but it was going to be a day in hell for me as I woke to a painful left knee following the middle ring silliness of the previous day. I had taken a couple of Ibuprofen and received a knee strapping from the medics on the ferry ride over, but despite the roars of encouragement from the groups of school kids on our way out of town it was clear from the start I was going to struggle. Unable to put any power down on climbs and struggling while spinning on flats I was not in a good place, especially with the many technical challenges that lay ahead.

Powell River has more than an abundance of roots and the main section of the day presented a seemingly endless spider web of wet and technical roots that twisted and turned tightly with sharp ups and downs, requiring great balance and root riding technique to stay

each climb and Garrett hung back with me for the ups. The climbs were long. Much of the stage was run over open logging roads and power line tracks interspersed with regular and extremely fun single track diversions that nipped in and out of the tree line, sweeping and fast. The pain of climbing disappeared as we entered each rollicking section. We agreed this stuff was exactly what we came to Canada to experience. I couldn't stay with Garrett on the downs, as he was off like some startled gazelle making the most of his moto skills (gazelles can ride moto too you know). Sweeping fast singletrack, loamy goodness and a bucket load of bridges (Canadians call this "trail furniture") thrown in for good measure. Simply awesome.

Reflecting back on this stage prompts me to offer some advice: sell your house and move to the Sunshine Coast...the one in BC.

Day 5: Sechelt to Squamish. Canada Day.

There was no bus or ferry today as the stage started from our campground. What we did have was lots of excited Canadians adorned with national flags (all a hootin' and hollerin') and celebrating their national day. There was also rain. It was bucketing down by the time we started the stage, but I was happy. Happy to be in Canada riding incredible trails, and happy because I could pedal with both legs. The rain was coming down over the road in sheets as we raced through Sechelt's back streets.

ran to catch the early ferry with only a few minutes to spare. The next ferry would be at least a two hour wait, so we were as happy as clams.

Our base for the next two days in Squamish was Brennan Park Recreation Centre. We hopped off the bus, grabbed our bags and headed straight to the showers in the Aquatic Centre. Awesome! We grabbed a tent, offloaded our gear and took a taxi to the laundry to do a huge load of washing. The mountain views in every direction at Squamish were outstanding. We had time to kill before our bikes arrived on the late ferry, so I went for a swim. We skipped dinner at the Rec Centre and headed into town with the Canberra riders for a big dinner at a popular sports bar. Hmmm, Canadian beer.

Day 6: The best of Squamish.

A quick bomb along the highway followed by a fire road climb prior to hitting the single track gave riders a chance to warm up the legs up before diving into the trails. We were told we would be riding a lot of furniture today, and that a lot of that furniture had consequences. They weren't wrong, there were lots of both - furniture and consequences. One of the first was a long string of planks about 12" wide and 50m long over a black swampy creek line. I cleaned it but I had some close calls. I did not want to go for a dip in that muck...especially as I'd just done a load of washing.



The course forced us to take on the new, the technical and at times, the scary and we grew in skill and confidence with each section cleared. This long section finally emptied us out onto logging roads that saw us riding through quite open logged sections of forest with spectacular views across to distant hills. A quick descent through a tight downhill chute strewn with fist-sized rounded rocks got us down to Aid Station 2. Another big climb was dead ahead so we took time to graze on the huge amount of food/energy supplements on offer.

The next climb was long, steep and demanding with a transition into some uphill singletrack that made the going harder again. I pushed the middle ring hard all the way to the top (unlike the smart folk from Canada who know that the granny gear is good). Once at the top, more fast, rooty and technical singletrack was followed by a really technical and truly wet section through a steep valley area that a mountain goat might have struggled with. It was slick, rooty, twisty and chaotic if you got it wrong (which I did) and I would have been tossed down the slope had it not been for a little sapling holding my bike upright as I lost control. I walked down a couple of sections that looked too menacing before the track took a turn up and out of the muck.

The remaining singletrack was tight and rooty until we got to the water's edge for some smoother track, which emptied onto a fast dirt track behind town. The final stretch into the finish was to thumping music, a beer garden and tasty takeaway food beckoned. Unfortunately the queue for the bike wash and a long wait in the

upright. For many it was a lottery. This was not a good day for me, though as the day progressed I did get a better handle on riding roots without spinning out. The day got a notch more interesting when we broke in a very fresh section of track that seemed to dive right down the hillside. It was loose, loamy and tricky with high odds of decking it over yet more roots. I guess the local trail guys made the most of a rare opportunity to have 500 sets of tyres over their newest track! The remaining trails were great, and a welcome change from the slow root-strewn trails of earlier. We finished the day with some fast fire road and dirt paths into the campground and aimed straight for the bike wash and fast food. Nice. Exceptional dinner and a hot shower after dessert. Sleep.

Reflecting back on this stage prompts me to offer some advice: only sell your house and move to Power River if you have root riding super powers.

Day 4: Earls Cove to Sechelt. Hump Day

The ferry from Saltery Bay delivered us to Earls Cove and the start of Hump Day — the mid-point stage of the BC Bike Race and the biggest single day of climbing. My knee wasn't working at this point but there was no option but to continue, we were there to ride. Ibuprofen would take the edge off but being such a big day in the hills we knew slow and steady would be the only strategy. I spun the granny

The rain was messing with my vision, so I balanced my glasses on my nose so I could see over them while keeping the mud out of my eyes... it sort of worked. More good climbing again today with plenty of technical rooty trails and lots of challenging furniture to ride. Bridges, logs and planks, some generous and safe, some skinny with consequences and some long with direction changes that created a few 'moments' for me. The truly scary ones were walked.

Day 5 was great for refining those root riding skills while climbing and working toward clearing (or at least getting further into) the many challenging technical sections the trails had to offer. This stuff was both hard work and fun at the same time. Two long climbs between Aid Station 1 and 2 softened the legs and then another short 3km climb after Aid 2 before we finally pointed downhill.

The 12km of descent from 770m to sea level was a thrilling ride with a mix of fast swoopy, steep, scary, narrow and technical track. There wasn't much margin for error in places as the hillsides were super steep. Getting it wrong could have seen you disappear from view and become cougar food. I chose my lines carefully and kept my speed in check. Garrett kicked in his moto skills and tore away. The last couple of kilometres descended through very fast and rocky track. I tried to keep up with Garrett, but that wasn't going to happen here without eating some rock. We burst out of the trees and raced down to the finish line above the Langdale ferry terminal. The race was not over though as we handed our bikes over to the race organisation and then

Powerline and double track trails took us through some beautiful country, dense woods and over plenty of bridges. The tracks were excellent, but the absolute highlight of the day was Half Nelson track — an amazingly buff roller coaster ride of perfectly crafted berms, kickers, multiple lines and yet more bridges that just seemed to go on and on. This is the sort of trail you could roll easy for smiles or rail flat out for a thrill ride.

After this, the trail turned up sharply for a steady climb and then turned downhill into perhaps the most technical rooty downhill stuff we'd encountered. A little freaked out in parts, I opted to scramble down rather than crash out. I was impressed by how some riders bombed through these sections like it was what they ride every day... this was until I reminded myself that we were in BC...they do ride this every day!

The rest of the day was steep windy single track climbs balanced by steep windy descents and fast traverses. Simply brilliant stuff to ride. The last couple of kilometres were run over a very fast section of flat trails where we raced a couple of German guys with numbers that indicated they were in our category. We had a strong finish and just pipped them at the post. Shimano Day celebrations at base camp made for a huge festival atmosphere. It had been our best day yet and the Red Truck beer was rather nice!

Sell your house, and move to Squamish.





Day 7: Whistler.

Final day... Damn that week went quick!

After an early start for breakfast we boarded the yellow buses for Whistler. I forgot my arm warmers which made for a chilly start. My 'what the' moment was seeing dozens of snowboarder kids in their winter gear heading for the lifts. There was still plenty of snow there! The final stage was a short 20km affair. A race start straight into a long climb right from the base of Blackcomb Mountain was a rude warm up.

After a 40 minute climb the course turned downward onto resort trails with big jumps and high banked berms which generated big smiles and some big air (too big for some). We even spied some black bears just up the hill from us.

Another lengthy climb and fast descent took us across to the second half of the course which revealed rocky, twisty and bridge-laden trails (all of which are named after Frank Zappa songs). These were a blast to ride.

We popped out onto tar at 18kms and thought we must be close to the finish, so started to wind up the speed only to pop back off road again. The stage director had decided to 'gift' us a few free kilometres including a cracking long climb and final descent into the resort to finish outside the Fairmont Chateau Resort. We crossed the line with a thank you handshake from the organiser Dean Payne, another souvenir shirt, finisher's belt buckle and a pound of coffee. The icing on the cake to 8 days of fantastic riding was a huge end of race dinner party at the Fairmont Chateau and a chance to say goodbye to new friends, and make plans for more riding somewhere in the future.

I'm sure there are cheaper ways to get a Dakine wheelie bag, but those ways would not get you a bag with "BC Bike Race"



embroidered on it, and it wouldn't come home full of unforgettable riding experiences. The BC Bike Race is nothing short of outstanding. If you've dreamed of traveling overseas and riding the best trails you could ever experience, then this is the race for you.

Things we learned.

- The Race:** Brilliant
- Riding:** Outstanding, Epic, Technical, Volume 10
- People:** Outstanding
- Scenery:** Outstanding
- Schwag:** We received a massive amount of kit. A large Dakine wheelie bag which carried our gear for the week, plus branded jersey, event t-shirt, socks, cycling glasses as well as a stack of energy products. We also got a finisher's T-Shirt and cool belt buckle.
- Aid Stations:** Outstanding. There were mountains of food, drink and energy supplements
- Meals:** All good, and plenty of it.
- Coffee:** You will struggle to find a decent coffee in Canada. We came kind of close once.
- Beer:** Great
- Event Logistics:** As an event organizer, I can appreciate how truly challenging an event like this must be to run. It ran like a well oiled machine of course and thanks must go to Dean, Andreas and their amazing team in pulling it off. Congratulations!
- Flights:** There's a range of airlines to get you over to Canada, but one you should NEVER fly with as a bike rider is United Airlines. We were both charged an extra USD\$200 each way for our bikes! At greater than four times what Air Canada charge, I'd call that extortionate. Other airlines do not charge for bikes, so we'll explore the alternatives next time. Also, make sure you do your own research on this front, as we got some poor advice from Flight Centre and paid the price.

Alan Vogt Event Coordinator / Mont 24 Hour Race



To find out about the 2011 BC Bike Race go to www.bcbikerace.com

