

# BLASTING THE BC BIKE RACE

WORDS: GARRY MILLBURN  
PHOTOS: MARGUS RIGA, DAVE  
SILVER, ERIK PETERSON,  
TODD WESELAKE



BC BIKE RACE IS THE RADDEST SEVEN DAY STAGE RACE IN THE WORLD. I KNOW THAT SOUNDS LIKE A BIG CALL WHEN YOU HAVE TRANSALP AND CAPE EPIC TO CONTEND WITH, HOWEVER THE BC BIKE RACE IS ABOUT SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST RACING, IT'S A JOURNEY. A JOURNEY THAT TAKES RIDERS THROUGH SOME OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FORESTS AND OVER THE GNARLIEST TERRAIN THAT BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA, IS KNOWN FOR.

BC Bike Race spawned from a passionate group of long time mountain bike and adventure race friends based on the West Coast of British Columbia. Their love for the spectacular terrain and the chance to involve others in the extraordinary riding on the West Coast created the concept of an epic stage race. Having just completed its 9th edition, it's fair to say all the entrants love it too.

## PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES

With so many riding destinations in BC, the race takes riders to seven of the most desirable locations. It does feel like these trails were hand picked by people who love to ride their bikes... and then they were left to figure out how to get hundreds of people and bikes between these locations. Organising the logistics would be quite a nightmare, buses, ferries, water taxis, float planes. The number of bays, mountains and passes to negotiate are almost innumerable. When it comes to ground (or air) transport, you name it they use it. However as a rider, the transitions are seamless and the views from a float plane are pretty epic.

The event itself is set over nine days. Seven days of racing, one day of registration and one day of transport. The seven days of racing cover approximately 320 kilometres, with about 10,000

metres of climbing. Now this doesn't sound truly epic but I can assure you the trails are not your typical flowing Aussie singletrack. Picture rock strewn descents, timber bridges skinnier than Chris Froome and climbs with more roots than you can poke a stick at. Don't let this put you off because the sense of accomplishment once you've made it to Whistler is pretty amazing. That is everyone's goal, no matter if they finish 5th or 500th.

## POSTCARD PERFECT

The West Coast of British Columbia is a backdrop like no other, the mountain ranges run all the way to stunning waterways, with small towns dotted in between. The mountains are filled with singletrack, with some trails dating back to the early 90s. There is a sense of magic and awe when you're out riding these trails. The trails, the towns and the views all add to the mystical beauty that is BC.

There was so much variety in the terrain that was ridden over the seven days, however there was one common element: everything was super technical. The first four days, Cumberland, Powell River, Earls Cove - Sechelt, Sechelt - Langdale offered riders really natural and gnarly terrain, with the singletrack following the dips and curves of the earth.





Riders had to navigate an almost endless supply of rocks, tree roots, and boulder drop offs. There were a few open flowing trails, but they were few and far between with the predominance being technical tight singletrack.

The following days through North Vancouver, Squamish and Whistler showed off what BC is really famous for and where the roots of technical mountain biking are embedded deep into the forest floor. The North Shore is synonymous with hand-built trails that include narrow bridges, berms, jumps and loads of timber work. And we certainly were not disappointed, with all of this on offer to ride, or on occasion hike-a-bike with steep stair cases and for some, too steep to ride climbs. Riders still had to deal with rocky and rooty trails in between the sweet timber work.

Every stage included at least one mountain climb that seemed relentlessly long in the searing heat, yet there was no respite from these climbs as the downhill sections were super steep and needed just as much effort to keep the bike on course. On the major descent of each day a feature trail is included. These sections used to be timed for bonus points, however some riders got a little caught up in this and for safety reasons it is now just some sweet singletrack to highlight what the area has to offer. Some of these trails are brand new, finished a few days before BCBR came along and others are well worn and loved trails.

#### PART OF THE COMMUNITY

The towns and local mountain bike clubs really get behind BCBR in such a big way. For some of these small towns the economic benefit would be great, inundated with 800 people all wanting to drink your coffee or beer, it's no wonder the towns welcomed us with open arms. However I think it is more than that I think they love to see all these riders with smiles on their faces enjoying what their community has to offer.



It is also a well known fact there is quite the competition amongst the towns to provide the best meals to the riders. Breakfasts and dinners are catered for when you buy the meal plan upgrade and you will not go hungry. Every morning and night we were greeted with delicious and healthy food, from spiced oatmeal and pastries in the morning to quinoa salads and slow cooked pork in the evenings. Riders are even treated to dessert buffets with assortments of cakes, slices and ice cream.

#### HOW THE RACE WAS WON

Bike handling counts, and it was the impressive and strong riders who really brought their A-game to BC Bike Race. Katerina Nash was victorious in the open women's category, while a hard charging Tristan Uhl won the highly competitive open men's race. The racing was super hot, literally and figuratively, and many stages came down to a sprint finish.

#### BC BIKE RACE BY THE NUMBERS

For so many reasons it is easy to see why so many people are attracted to the BC Bike Race, with



**When to go:** BCBR 2016 is from 6-13 July – Get in quick as entries are selling fast!

**Getting there:** Qantas or Air Canada, prices range from \$1700 - \$2200 incl taxes

**Other riding:** For more riding post-race, Whistler is the obvious choice as the race finishes here. Although you have the sweet trails of Pemberton, Squamish, Silverstar and the North Shore all within a two hour drive. Renting a downhill bike is easy, \$130 - \$160 will get you a premium rig with all the protective gear. Lift passes are approximately \$60 per day.

**Accommodation:** Accommodation is provided during the race via

Tent City but pre and post race you'll need to book something in Vancouver and Whistler. Pricing ranges from \$100 - \$300+ for something more luxurious.

**Rehydrating:** Food and beer is similar to Australian pricing, \$3-\$4 for coffee, \$7-\$8 for a beer, mains \$12-\$35 depending on your style.

**Tipping:** Tip 10-20% for dining, taxi, concierge services. Taxes are often not included on product pricing and are added after.

**Pro tip:** Do some push ups and ride the hardest trails in your local area until you have them dialled and then still expect more than you could possibly imagine.



2016 registration open and already 90% sold it is definitely something that holds a lot of appeal. 2015 saw 622 entrants, representing 24 countries including all the usual countries but also Guatemala, Israel and Zambia. 86% were males with the average age being 40. With a solo category now an option, 61% have chosen to race it alone, with the remainder in teams. The general skill level of the Canadian and US riders is far better than most Aussies and when you look at the trails they get to ride on its easy to see why. There are plenty of 40ish year old men walking about the base camps that look ready to take on the Tour. However there are just as many weekend warriors in their baggies ready to let it all hang loose and take in more than just the racing. With 622 bikes locked up together each evening it is easy to see how much people love this sport, because there is a hell of a lot of dollars right there. I can confidently say I didn't see a bike worth less than \$3000, with the majority heading up towards \$8000 - \$10,000. Which is one of the reasons we come to race...to show off our pride and joy.

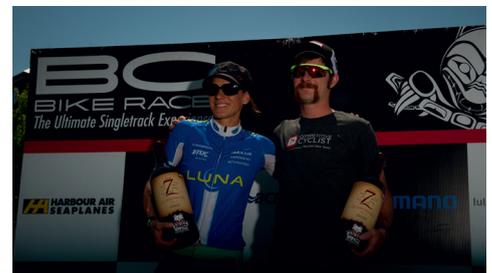


It's pretty clear that most of the local Canadians are not riding super-fast hardtails or 100mm dual suspension 29ers. The locals opt for something a little more plush in the 120-140mm range. Rocky Mountain is really the standard flavour but I also saw plenty of nice rigs from Santa Cruz, Yeti and Kona.



For me that's my 2015 Trek Superfly FS. I made a few changes to my Trek Superfly FS in order to make the 7 days as fast and comfortable as possible. The first was adding a RockShox Reverb dropper seat post. This allows you to get the seat out of the way on steep descents or more technical sections, giving much greater control. Looking back after the event I no longer think this is an essential mod but nice to do if you can. I also switched to a SRAM Gripshift for the event. This again was a control and ease of use thing for me. No matter what the situation is, you can always shift in a micro second and get it done!

BC Bike race should definitely be on your bucket list of must do races, Danielle, Dre, Dean and the whole BCBR team will welcome you with open arms for the best week of your life with the ultimate singletrack experience.



*Thanks to BC Bike Race for hosting Garry Millburn for the 2015 race.*