



Wines2Whales



Image: Nick Muzic

The Wines2Whales Shiraz is a three-day mountain bike race from Lourensford to Onrus in the Western Cape, winding through vast wine valleys and finishing in one of South Africa's favourite whale watching spots. Last year Wessel Botha and Matt Beers won the race after beating Alan Hatherly and Simon Andreasson and taking the top step of the podium. Although Wessel Botha And Nico Bell were meant to race together, plans changed when Nico fell sick a few days before the race and was prescribed antibiotics. Luckily Matt Beers had recently returned from riding stagiaire in Europe and was on standby as a replacement in case the team needed another rider and he joined Wessel to try and defend their 2018 title. "It was a bit of an unknown for me coming from a different discipline again. I wasn't sure how I was going to feel as my last mountain bike race was Sani2c in May and then I broke my collarbone"- Matt Beers. "I feel my preparation was really good for this race and I was really looking forward to it"- Wessel Botha.

Stage 1

The first stage of the race took riders from Lourensford Wine Estate to Oak Valley Wine Estate over 65km and 1700m. The team planned to hit the first climb as hard as they could to shake off some of the slower riders. Their plan worked and Matt and Wessel got a decent gap on the rest of the riders, with DSV and Pyga chasing them. Pyga caught the team just as they reached the portage, a section where riders are required to get off and carry their bikes. Unfortunately the pace was slow going up the portage and team DSV caught the other two teams. There was a bit of a 'cat and mouse' chase towards the end, with the stage ending in a sprint. Matt rode over the finish line first, followed by Philip from Pyga. Wessel managed to cross the line before Matthys Beukes, placing the team in first place overall by the skin of their teeth.



Stage 2

The second stage of the race followed the trails around the area of the Oak Valley Wine estate and surrounds in 64km and 1500m. The team had a bit more confidence after the previous day's win, but with time gaps the pressure was on to ensure that the time gaps were opened. Once again Matt set a very hard pace on the front to get rid of some of the other teams and it was only DSV and Pyga who managed to hang on. Matt sat on the front the whole day, setting an uncomfortable tempo for the other two teams. Wessel and Matt planned to attack at around 47km on one of the main climbs of the day and they created a gap with about 16kms to the finish. Matt and Wessel won the stage and increased their gap to around a minute and a half with DSV in second place and Pyga in third.

Stage 3

The last day of Wines2Whales was 69km with 1400m from Oak Valley to Onrus. The team planned to make it difficult for the other teams from the beginning to ensure that the weaker teams would drop off. Matt sat on the front again and set the pace and only DSV could keep up. Matt and Wessel increased the pace a bit to test whether Arno and Gert would drop off. Sensing weakness, Matt increased the pace again by the Art House climb around 45km in and managed to drop DSV in the dust and create a large gap as security in case anything went wrong in terms of punctures and mechanicals. Matt and Wessel rode alone for the rest of the race and took the stage win and overall Wines2Whales victory with an overall lead of around 5 minutes.

Elite Men's General Classification after Stage 3:

- NAD Pro MTB: Matthew Beers & Wessel Botha (07:32:37)
- DSV Pro Cycling: Arno du Toit & Gert Heyns (07:37:40 | +05:03)
- PYGA Euro Steel: Matthys Beukes & Philip Buys (07:40:04 | +07:27)
- Jaguar Power Products: Keagan Bontekoning & Jean-Pierre Lloyd (07:54:34 | +21:57)
- SPOT Africa DEVMCO Umhlanga Arch: Timothy Hammond & Julian Jessop (08:10:09 | +37:32)

“We rode so well together and Wessel has really improved as a rider so it was a great way to finish off the race. I couldn't ask for a better way to come back to mountain biking”- Matt Beers. “Coming onto the beach was a really cool feeling. It was pretty much a perfect Wines2Whales”-Wessel Botha.

The team still have a few small races coming up, with Wessel Botha racing the last Nissan Trailseeker for the year and Nico and Matt taking part in the Coronation Double Century.

