



Barberton Ultra Marathon



The Barberton Ultra Marathon is the toughest category of the Barberton XCM race routes, with 110km and 3266m elevations. The race takes place in Barberton in Mpumalanga, about 43 kilometers away from Mbombela.

Nico Bell won the race for two years in a row and this year he returned in the hope of continuing his winning streak and getting in some good training for Cape Epic. The night before the race brought wet and rainy conditions, adding some muddy challenges to the course for this year and ensuring that the racing was going to be a lot more interesting with the added wet conditions!



The race began with a neutral zone with all the riders together up the tar road. After the neutral zone the riders hit a very muddy section, before approaching the main climb where there were four riders upfront including Nico, Alan Gordon, Timo Cooper and Barend Burger.

The pace then lifted slightly and soon there were only three riders left upfront. Some of the riders were struggling with the loose and slippery sections and Nico pushed the pace harder on the downhill sections to try and see if the guys would make mistakes. Some grassy sections caused bits of grass to get stuck between the rider's pedals/gears and cranks making it hard to pedal and affecting the gears of the bikes.



There were a few accelerations with Alan and Timo trying to get a gap on each other, but Nico didn't have the 'legs' after drinking his Bilharzia pills the Wednesday before the race and he knew it was going to be a tough race to contend. He rode his own pace and kept the other two riders in his sight. He caught up to the front again on a downhill section and all three riders were together again. The three riders tried to get away from each other, but to no avail. As they entered the reserve, Nico sat on the front and increased the pace on the technical downhills, creating a small gap and putting pressure on the others.

Timo Cooper dropped off the group on the downhill after the main climb and only Nico and Alan were left upfront. Nico attacked Alan with about 1km to go and took the win on the day, arriving at the finish caked with mud. He was happy with his win considering that it was a day when he didn't feel 100% right, but he managed to pull it off anyway.

Nico will be competing in the National Road Champs Time Trial on 5 Feb and the whole team will be competing in the SA National Road Champs road race on 9 February.

