



SA National Road Champs



The South African National Champs is the 'blue ribbon' event for each cycling discipline and is held each year. The event crowns the National Champion in their chosen discipline, for their respective gender and age groups. This year the South African National Road Championship was held at the Swadini Forever Resort in Mpumalanga from 5-9 February. Nico, Wessel and Matt took part, with Nico also entering the National Individual Time Trial Championship which took place on the Friday of the event. There were a number of SA road team as well as the international World Tour team NTT and Daryl Impey from Mitchelton Scott.

The Time Trial



The Individual Time Trial was a 36km loop with 462m of elevation gain. Nico knew the TT would be tough, with Daryl Impey and Stefan De Bod both bringing their World Tour experience to the table, so he planned to work towards the third step of the podium

The first 20km went well, with Nico able to hold some good watts, but struggled a bit with the sight drag towards the finish. He felt that he went too hard up the first climb and lost momentum, leading to a lack of recovery. Nico lost a few watts and unfortunately third position slipped through his fingers by about 20 seconds and he finished in 4th place overall. "I was still happy with my result because I rode as hard as I could and the new Specialized Shiv TT was an awesome bike" - Nico Bell.

Results:

Daryl IMPEY 41:52.

Stefan DE BOD 42:32.01

Kent MAIN 44:00.94

Nico BELL 44:20.5

Brandon DOWNES 44:31.00

Rohan DU PLOOY 46:02.39

Jayde JULIUS 50:16.60

Gustav BASSON 52:03.75

The Road Race

The road race section of SA Champs was a 5 times repeat of one circuit, making up a total distance of 175km. The team were prepared for a tough race as they were up against Daryl Impey and other World Tour riders who were hungry for the National title. Some wet and windy weather also threatened to make the racing even more challenging. The plan was to get away with a break early on in the race, but unfortunately Nico was struck with a flat tyre as the break of about five riders got away. Five minutes later, Nico got another flat wheel, this time on the back and had to do another change and there was no chance that he could ride across to the break. Nico joined NTT upfront to try and chase down the breakaway and assisted Matt and Wessel to try and get them closer to the breakaway too.



A lot of the teams in the peloton did not want to help chase down the breakaway as they had riders in the breakaway group. It was up to NTT, Daryl Impey and the NAD riders to chase down. Nico did the work to help Matt and Wessel and ended up dropping off the back after Ryan Gibbons from NTT attacked on a climb section. Matt was also plagued with two punctures during his race due to glass and the wet roads, making the experience less than ideal. There were a lot of attacks, with many riders marking Daryl to ensure that he wouldn't get away. At around 80km into the race the breakaway had a gap of around 7-8 minutes, which is a very large gap to close.

Wessel had a slight wheel touch on his third lap which was a close call as he went off of the road, but managed to chase his way back.



In the last lap of the race Matt and Wessel decided to turn up the heat and do some pacing and bring the gap down from around 4 minutes to 1 minute 30. From there onwards the race started opening up and the group still had quite a gap to close with only a few kilometres to go. They managed to catch the break with about 500m to go and the race ended in a sprint finish, with the sprinters unleashing their speed at the finish line. Not everyone's legs could hold and those who paced on the front paid the price for their hard work, with little energy left for the sprint. Wessel was boxed in and had to swerve for a car parked in the road, which left him at the back of the pack. Matt was the highest placed team NAD rider, with a 17th place overall and 7th in the Elite category.

"We tried our best, sometimes it works your way and sometimes not. It was good prep and we are looking forward to the next training block" - Nico Bell

"Considering we only had three of us, we rode well" - Matt Beers

View the full results:

<https://results.finishtime.co.za/results.aspx?CId=35&RId=3008&EId=1&dt=1>

