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XPD Portugal, Estoril: 6-9 December 2007

Race Reporting by Nicholas Mulder. Cascais, Portugal

ESTORIL PORTUGAL XPD RACE 2007

Bad Tidings for the River Paddle Saturday, 8 December 2007 (14h30)

A bright blue sky has dawned over the village of Reguengo do Alviela. It is the 8th of December, a national holiday in Portugal and the hills are therefore alive with the sounds of gun fire. Shooting appears to be a highly popular pastime in this country, with Thursdays, Sundays and Public Holidays open season against the country's wildlife. Teams are arriving at this small village at a rapid rate. It is a hive of activity as teams drop their mountain bikes and proceed on either roller blades along quiet, flat country roads to the nearby town of Pombalinho, or opt to miss the CP on that loop entirely and proceed directly to the paddling section on the River Tejo, just 1km distant.



By opting to miss the checkpoint on the roller blading section, teams also save time as they do not need to change into and out of their blades before the paddle. This means that most teams have pushed straight onto the paddle. There are a few exceptions, particularly the leaders and some teams with good blading skills such as Teams Arena, Alpine Pro, Lima, Feed the Machine, Durasport, Master Unit and Tilak.

Teams high on the ranking list who have opted to skip the roller blading include SMS, Sleepmonsters and Cyanosis. Team Cyanosis were the centre of much amusement at the put-in of the river banks when they lost one their sit-on-top kayaks to the river. Whilst lowering their boat down the steep sand banks on the river edge, Donovan Sims let go of the handle. The boat slid slowly down to the water's edge, but then continued across the surface into the main current. Thankfully Team Sleepmonsters / Inov-8 (UK) were on hand to rescue the drifting boat, preventing someone in Team Cyanosis from needing to take an icy swim.

The leaderboard has remained fairly constant overnight during the major trekking leg that preceded the mountain biking to Reguengo do Alviela. There has been some confusion as one compulsory checkpoint's electronic timing system seems to have malfunctioned, making it appear as though some teams missed the CP and pushing them down the leaderboard. Organisers are presently investigating and will surely correct any abnormalities.

Team Alpine Pro / Nutrend / Merida of the Czech Republic remain at the top of the leaderboard. They are one of only 3 teams who have visited all optional CPs to date, the others being Team Teva / La Pinilla of Spain, and fellow Czech country-mates Team Tilak / OpavaNet / Merida.

Tilak left the transition at the end of the overnight trek after a short sleep, moving into 2nd position as Teva opted for a longer nap. The next few placings go to Salmon Navigator (Poland), Lima Salomon (Slovenia) and Master Unit (Finland). After a tough night, Team Cyanosis, who opted to skip a few CPs due to sleep deprivation, have slipped down to 9th. They have since recovered and look set to move up the rankings yet again.

Teams now start facing cut-off times as various stages start to close down. The most important cut-off is at 1430 GMT (Saturday) at the start of the river paddle. The teams on top of the leaderboard are presently pushing the pace to finish collecting checkpoints before proceeding onto this leg, whilst others have started paddling earlier to avoid darkness on the river. With an incoming tide pushing upriver, the paddle should prove to be much longer than the 56km distance it covers. May this give an advantage to teams who started paddling earlier this morning? Expect times of well over 8 hours for some of the teams who get their timing wrong.

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Photos can be viewed at www.flickr.com/photos/21332583@N05/sets/

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crawl if you must; **just never give up**".
Dean Karnazes
Ultra distance runner

