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XPD Portugal, Estoril: 6-9 December 2007

Race Reporting by Nicholas Mulder. Cascais, Portugal



Race Briefing reveals a Long, Challenging Course Thursday, 6 December 2007 (03h45)

Race briefing on Wednesday evening revealed a long and challenging course for the Estoril Portugal XPD. Starting in the town centre of Cascais, teams will embark on their journey on roller blades, navigating the busy streets of western Portugal for 9km till they reach Guincho Beach, west of town. Following first light at 07h00 on Thursday morning, teams will start at 2-minute intervals, depending on their position on the Wednesday night prologue. Teams have the option of putting up to two of their members on trikke bikes, a move that appears to be favoured by teams less experienced in blading. Various teams, particularly the European ones, seem to have decided to keep all four members on their inline skates however, expecting a flattish course that will allow them to reach higher speeds.



At the first transition zone, teams will start a coasteering leg with a distance of up to 17km, depending on the number of check points the teams opt to visit. Although the weather is expected to be sunny, with a high of 19°C, sea swells of 5.5m have been forecast, forcing the organisers to cancel 1 check point, and strongly suggesting to teams that they do not attempt any swimming on any section of this leg. The coastal terrain is tough, with sharp rock cliffs facing the sea at various stages, which will force teams to climb a total of 890m over the 17km. Teams will also need to be aware of high tide, which is set for 12h28. The effect that this will have on the leg is unknown to teams at present, but the faster ones will undoubtedly be aiming to complete the leg before it gets too high.

Teams will then start a monster 94km cycle, taking them through 10 checkpoints, 3 of which will be compulsory. This will bring them to the end of the first stage at Outeiro da Cabeça, and give them their first opportunity to dig into their food and gear boxes. Darkness should have enveloped all teams on the long mountain bike leg, so they will undoubtedly head out on the next 46km trekking leg well dressed. A series of up to 6 optional check points (at least 1 must be visited) will bring them back to Outeiro da Cabeça, where they will then head out on a combination of disciplines, with two persons per team on mountain bike and the other two on trikkes - 34km in total.

A short, 13km trekking leg follows, but it is interspersed with a short succession of technical tasks. At various checkpoints, teams will need to rock climb, abseil and use the trikkes on a steep downhill run. Any survivors will be able to progress to the third stage of the race at the transition, where once again they will have access to their boxes.

The third part of the course features some extremely long legs in steep terrain. A cycle of up to 65km and 1650m of climb (including an abseil into a limestone cave and subsequent caving leg) is followed immediately by a 45km trekking stage with 880m of climb. By this stage however, most teams should have slowed their pace considerably, with even the leaders potentially in a position to miss certain checkpoints in order to make stage cut-off times. These front teams should reach the end of this third stage in the town of Olhos de Água by Friday evening, where they will once again find their food and gear boxes.

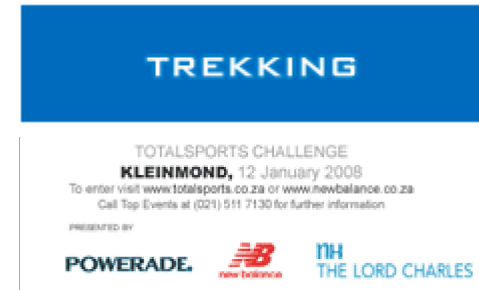
Stage 4 is broken down into 4 sections. Teams will start with a mountain bike with a potential maximum distance of 53km (780m climb) and then a roller blading leg of 16km. Once again, teams may opt to put up to 2 team members on trikkes. Teams will then don wetsuits and portage their boats to the Tagus River for 56km of fast-flowing river paddling. For the front teams, this may well be done at night. Then follows another long 34km trek with 590m of climb to end the stage.

The fifth and final stage will take teams to one of the regions famous attractions, the National Park of Sintra-Cascais. The initial mountain bike of 73km (1280m climb) will take teams to the historical town of Sintra, overlooked by prominent palaces and forbidding topography. A trekking leg of up to 21km will lead teams through an abseil and down to Praia dos Pescadores, a beach back in the starting town of Cascais. >From here it is a final 6km paddle eastwards to Tamariz Beach in Estoril. En route, teams will need to do a final snorkelling activity to get a check point before they brave the shorebreak of the Estoril beach.

The entire route measures out to over 580km, with approximately 10'000m of climb. It will be a formidable team that manages to complete this entire route and visit all the optional check points in the allotted 81 hours. Navigational and tactical mistakes, the need for sleep and maybe even the weather may all be adverse factors preventing the winners from achieving this. It would also be surprising if the organisers designed a route where visiting all the check points is possible, thereby removing an important tactical aspect from the race. A final race winners distance of just under 500km may prove more realistic, but expect some teams to go out hard on day 1 anyway. The next few days will answer this and many more questions.

Keep updated at www.AR.co.za for all the latest news from the Estoril Portugal XPD.

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



"Run when you can, walk when you have to, crawl if you must; **just never give up**".
Dean Karnazes
Ultra distance runner

