

WARRIOR



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Photos: Charles Robertson / MTB-Void.co.uk

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The Maribor World Cup almost didn't happen this year. After the event's biggest funder dropped out, the race organizer had written a letter of cancellation to the UCI, but just two weeks before the event the UCI and the organizer hashed things out at Houffalize and the legendary maribor WC was on again. I arrived on Thursday to a whole bunch of rain; it wasn't a good start. I had flashbacks to 09 when qualies got cancelled. The general atmosphere was not that great. People weren't too happy that it was raining, as everyone went there expecting dust. The Athertons were upbeat, coming from a high after winning the British national at Fort William. The Syndicate were also looking forward to riding their new bikes under proper racing conditions.



Lots of new technology was on show. Mick Hannah was saying that his new Vivid with Blackbox technology was the best air shock that has ever been made and that in his opinion there is no closer match to a coil shock. It's also reportedly a full pound lighter than the Rockshox coil shock. He wasn't running it at Maribor due to the extreme roughness of the track. He told me it's more for smoother tracks. The Blackbox Boxxers were also running new black stanchions which reportedly cut down on friction. The new Specialized Demos were kept tightly under wraps. I was talking to Fraser Britton and he was saying no one is allowed to shoot a close-up of them. They were stored away in a blacked-out pit set-up so no one could see them, and Sam and Brendan



Top: Brendan, a face-full of vomit and still in third. He's learning how to tame his raw speed and a win surely is only around the corner. Below: Gwin leads Hannah in practice. Not ideal conditions for the man from San Diego but he still kept it in the top ten, adding versatility to the blistering speed we already know he's capable of. Opposite: from the freeway of Fort William to the slickest, tech-est tracks on the WC circuit, Greg can pull off a win absolutely anywhere.





A mountain of tear-offs: this sums up the weekend perfectly. Filip Pole enjoys his clear vision while it lasts.

“ We went to Maribor knowing that we were slightly late with all our preparations. Some of the riders were injured before the season and had just got back on the bike. The staff were new to the World Cup scene and we couldn't expect to go big this weekend. But our French pinners rocketed us to first place in the team ranking!! I could hardly believe it when they called us to the podium, some of the riders had already left for the apartment. This is a big motivation to everybody on the team to work together even harder.

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Claudio Caluori. Team Manager, Scott11

First in qualifying and 5th in finals with a crash. Sam is not holding back this year, even fresh off an injury.

were both instructed to do full runs only - no stopping. I was expecting the majority of the buzz to be revolving around the carbon V-10s but the mystery surrounding the new Demo meant that all the talk that weekend was about Specialized. Troy Brosnan was also a big topic of conversation. To be fair he was the fastest junior but I wasn't overly impressed. I think if Neko Mulally was there Troy would have been smoked.

The weather was terrible, with spiked tyres and rain jackets being par for the course. Taking photos in those conditions was a nightmare, and made worse by the riders' rainjackets making them all look very similar. Rach and Gee were fully kitted-up in practice as was Hill so those guys came out better on camera. Also my pocketwizards wouldn't fire my flash if I was more than 5 feet away, but everyone seemed to have that same problem which was very strange! I tried a lot more panned shots than usual as Gary Perkin was giving me some tips on how to pan properly, so I gave that a blast. I also tried to shoot a lot of non-race shots as well to give a feel for the conditions and to create a mood.

In practice I figured Danny Hart would do well as he looked pinned all weekend and had the 2nd fastest timed practice run, and also one of the Ruffin brothers (sorry, not sure which one!) was looking rapid all throughout practice.

The course became hugely different once the rain started, and in the wet it was all about who had the power to plough through the slop and who had the bike skills to stay onboard. I think the need to put the power down through the slop suited some of the clipped-in riders like Greg and Gee, but at the same time it was very much a flat pedal track as everyone was dabbing a foot here and there in corners as it was getting so wild. Brendan is an example of that, and I was very impressed with his riding this weekend. He is definitely going to have a good season this year. Greg's win was a little bit of a surprise. Everyone was expecting him to do well, but taking the win exceeded most people's expectations. Sam and Brendan I can easily see being first and second when the dust settles at the end of the season. Specialized have really got their shit together this year. Sam was unlucky to crash, removing a tear-off and just couldn't hold on from what I hear. In fourcross, the weather really made it a nightmare, it was so sludgy and slow. It would have been awesome in the dry though, as it had some big doubles, fast turns and multiple lines.

I will be reporting from World Cup round 2 at Fort William in a couple of weeks. My predictions, Greg to take it, Steve (Peat) to finish outside the top 10, CRC's Matt Simmonds to get a top 10 and Mick Hannah to finish on the podium, perhaps even second to Greg. Until next time....Charles Robertson



Classic Brendan: riding on the very edge of control. The difference this year and last seems to be the maturity and patience to put together consistent podium runs week after week.



“*AS*aribor was my first World Cup race with my new ride on the Yeti World Cup Program. I was riding awesome in practice, doing all my runs with Mick Hannah and my teammate Aaron Gwin, and feeling up to speed. Qualifying came around and 260 riders were going for the top 80 spots for finals. By the time my run had come around it had been raining for 24 hours and the course was blown out, rough, rooty, and muddy beyond all belief! I was on a good run until I tore all of my tearoffs off at once and couldn't see anything for the rest of my run. It was a nightmare! I really learned a lot from this race even though it didn't go as well as planned. The new bikes were working absolutely amazing and the new kits have come together very nicely! Now I'm just looking forward to going as fast as I can”

Joey Schusler, Yeti World Cup Team