

38th Girvan 3 Day Cycle Race promoted by Wallacehill Cycling Club

Stage 3: Newton Stewart – Girvan, 108 miles

Overnight leader Chris Newton (recycling.co.uk) took a slender 7 second advantage over Ian Wilkinson (Science in Sport) into the third – and longest - stage of the Girvan, with 2003 winner John Tanner (Sportscover) a further second behind in third place.

Although Newton Stewart has featured as a finish location on several occasions, this was the first time the race would start in the town. An enthusiastic crowd lined the main street to cheer the riders away from the ceremonial start, and they didn't have long to wait to see them again as the peloton swept back into the main street after a short circuit to contest the first Endura Hot Spot Sprint of the day. Gordon McCauley (Plowman Craven) holder of the green jersey further increased his lead in the competition by taking first place.

With 16 miles covered, the second sprint in Wigtown saw McCauley fail to score with Giancarlo Checci (Rapha Condor RT) taking maximum points. However McCauley was soon to launch an attack in the company of Alex Higham (Bike & Run London) and Neil Jones (Team OANDS). They were swiftly joined by four others: Jason Allen (Plowman Craven), Dave Collins (Science in Sport), Robin Sharman (KFS Special Vehicles) and Checchi. However the peloton were very active and soon two further chasing groups merged with the leaders to give a 21 man leading group with 20 miles gone. Newton had made the junction along with Wilkinson and Tanner, but the break was not destined to succeed as the main field bridged the gap as Creetown was reached at 29 miles.

McCauley was not content to give up so easily and soon forced a new move in the company of Graham Briggs (recycling.co.uk), Checci, Sharman, Richard Cartland (Team Corley) and David Clarke (Team OANDS). By the first Carrick Gazette King of the Mountains climb at Pibble Hill the group had an advantage in excess of 30 seconds with Checci taking the prime ahead of Polka Dot jersey McCauley. Pursued by three opportunistic chasers, the leaders stretched their advantage to almost a minute. It was time for the GC contenders to make a move and Newton and Wilkinson were aided by Ashley Brown (Sportscover) and Tristan Barnes (Wills Wheels) in a serious effort to close the gap. Quickly sweeping up the three chasers they were joined in their efforts by Sharman, Roy Chamberlain (Team Corley), James Millard (Plowman Craven) and Richard Sykes-Popham (Glendene CC).

As the race crossed the Bengray Hill prime the 6 leaders still had more than 30 seconds over the 11 chasers with the main field now more than a minute behind. Significantly both Tanner, and winner of the previous weeks Tour of the Reservoir Dean Downing (Rapha Condor), had missed the moves.

Just over half distance and the junction was made between the leaders and chasers as the peloton lost more time. An attack by Millard soon opened a gap and he was joined by Scott Gamble (Ashfield CC) and Clarke. The high pace shed several riders from the lead group and by the start of the final KOM climb of the day at Dersalloh Hill – site of a proposed new wind farm for main race sponsor Scottish Power Renewables – the three leaders had only a 16 second lead. Now the big guns really did fire and Wilkinson, Newton and McCauley caught and passed the leaders. In the final 10 mile run in back to Girvan their advantage steadily increased with the three working well together.

Entering the finish circuit, with the rest of the race fragmented over several miles, the three could afford to play a game of cat and mouse as they angled for the best position in the final sprint. With a 15 second time bonus for the first across the line, and Newton's advantage over Wilkinson just 7 seconds, the leaders jersey hung in the balance.

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Forced to lead out the sprint, Wilkinson launched a blistering attack in the left hand gutter. Unable to overhaul the SIS rider, Newton also lost out on second to a fast sprinting McCauley and with it the yellow jersey went to Wilkinson by the smallest of margins. To add to his second place, McCauley retained both the Points and King of the Mountains jerseys.

It has been a consistent Girvan for Wilkinson so far, improving his podium place on each stage. All that lies between him and overall victory is the final 72 mile stage. However with 5 classified climbs along the route – including the notorious ‘Nick O’ Balloch’, the long twisting ascent of the ‘The Screws’ and Hadyard Hill – where last year’s race split apart – he was under no illusions that it will be an easy task.