

## **38<sup>th</sup> Girvan 3 Day Cycle Race promoted by Wallacehill Cycling Club**

### **Stage 4: Girvan – Girvan, 72 miles**

The Girvan has seen some nail-bitingly close finishes in recent years and with just 3 seconds separating the yellow jersey of Ian Wilkinson (Science in Sport) from former leader Chris Newton (recycling.co.uk) the 2007 race would be no exception. Lying third at 16 seconds behind the leader was 1999 Girvan winner Gordon McCauley, riding for the Plowman Craven-Evans Cycles team. No one underestimated the threat that the strong New Zealander would pose, already the holder of both Points and King of the Mountains jerseys since stage 1.

The final day dawned damp and overcast, a contrast to the warm and sunny conditions of the previous three stages. With five classified climbs on the route, including the Nick O’Balloch – a cruel ascent of over two miles on narrow and twisting forest roads - and Hadyard Hill, a decisive point in the 2006 race, there were also three hot spot sprints to be contested. It was going to be a hard day in the saddle for the 74 riders who took the start.

McCauley started as he meant to go on by securing the first climb of the day at Byne Hill, and as the riders headed for Barr the service crews were kept busy with numerous punctures caused by the damp roads and difficult surfaces. On leaving the village, McCauley launched his first significant attack but was quickly brought back by the attentive peloton. However it was a marker for things to come and when he kicked again on the narrow roads approaching ‘The Nick’ a gap was soon opened and the Plowman Craven man was joined on the lower slopes of the climb by David Clarke riding for the composite Team OANDS – himself no stranger to the roads of the Girvan having scored a second place on a stage of the 2003 race.

Working well together their lead had grown to 45 seconds by the summit and McCauley tightened his grip on the Carrick Gazette Polka Dot jersey, again taking maximum points on the line. The technical descent down to Rowantree Toll then the climb over Tairlaw saw visibility reduced to only a couple of metres with the low cloud and steady rain and almost inevitably there was a crash in the main field. This presented an opportunity for Lee Davis (Pinarello RT) and Philip Brown (Velo Ecosse) to try an escape and they quickly established a gap, though the prospect of catching the leaders grew increasingly remote as they powered toward the first hot spot sprint in Straiton. McCauley allowed Clarke to take maximum points at the prime, and also at the next sprint in Crosshill after 37.6 miles.

By this time the leaders had more than 2½ minutes advantage over the main field which containing both Newton and Wilkinson, making McCauley the yellow jersey on the road and offering the prospect of one rider taking all three major classifications in the race. With 41 miles gone, and the chasers now back in the peloton, McCauley and Clarke still had over two minutes lead as they began the climb of Hadyard Hill. But, just like in 2006, the peloton – with Newton’s recycling.co.uk in particular – began to lift the pace and by the prime line had cut almost a minute from the lead. Back into Barr and straight on to the next climb – ‘The Screws’ – the lead continued to come down with Newton himself driving at the front of the peloton.

The efforts paid off as McCauley and Clarke saw their lead reduced to just 40 seconds. McCauley had settled for second place at each of the prime points, content that he had sufficient points to retain both classifications at the end of the race. As the race headed back towards Girvan for a final 15 mile loop it was Sportscover rider Mark Lovatt who put in a strong attack and this was the catalyst for others to go too, and by the final hot spot at Victory Park the leaders were almost caught. The frantic pace had fragmented the peloton and when McCauley and Clarke were finally reeled in at 57.6 miles just 11 riders remained in contention for the stage win. Significant amongst

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them were Newton, Wilinon, Lovatt, Robin Sharman (KFS Special Vehicles), Dean Downing (Rapha Condor RT), Graham Briggs (recycling.co.uk) and John Tanner (Sportscover).

But McCauley was not giving up without a fight and launched attack after attack as Byne Hill was tackled for the second time. Accompanied by Lee Davies he managed to gain a lead of 5 seconds but Newton again closed the gap with Lovatt continuing to work hard too. Inside 5 miles to go and the leading riders were all together again.

With the rain reduced to a slight drizzle and some brightness in the sky, the crowd awaiting the final sprint in Victory Park were considering the prospect of the race outcome being decided by time bonuses at the finish. However as the riders came in to view and the sprint began, it was winner of the previous week's Tour of the Reservoir Dean Downing who got a gap and jubilantly crossed the line ahead of Briggs and Andy Roach (Pinarello RT) who finished 4 seconds behind. Fourth and sixth places in the same time for Newton and Wilkinson respectively meant that their overall GC positions remained unchanged and with McCauley in the same group he retained third place overall.

So a look at the final General Classification might suggest that the decisive stage of the 2007 Girvan had been something of a non event – but nothing could be further from the truth. Wilkinson and his young SIS team had fought hard to defend the jersey and managed to hold off the strength of Newton and the recycling team. A superb, aggressive ride by McCauley retained his third place overall and secured for him both the Endura Sprints jersey and Carrick Gazette King of the Mountains jersey. The team GC award went to Pinarello RT whilst the composite Team OANDS took the club team prize.

Seventeen years after his win in the Girvan, Wayne Randle (Sportscover) finished as best placed 2<sup>nd</sup> Category rider, whilst Dafydd Dylan (KFS Special Vehicles) took the Pete Longbottom memorial Under 23 prize.

Speaking on the podium after his victory, Ian Wilkinson admitted that he had a particular affection for the Girvan and was delighted to have come out winner to add to his third place in the seasons opening Premier Calendar event, the Bikeline Two Day in North Wales.

With another superb organisational job from Ian Sinclair and his team, and the continuing support of main sponsors Scottish Power Renewables the 38<sup>th</sup> edition of the Girvan enhanced it's reputation as arguably the finest stage race on the UK racing calendar.