

39th Girvan 3 Day Cycle Race promoted by Wallacehill Cycling Club

Stage 4: Girvan - Girvan, 72 miles

Whilst Girvan managed to avoid the worst of the Easter weather, an early morning inspection of the intended route for Stage 4 revealed that the high level roads of the Nick o' Balloch climb and Tairlaw summit were affected by snow and ice cover and could not safely be used. Fortunately the organisers already had a plan for such eventualities and a revised route – offering a similar stage distance and number of primes – was efficiently put into place.

The leg-sapping ascent of Hadyard Hill remained as the only 1st category climb and once again would prove to be a decisive point in the outcome of the race. An early attack by Mark Lovatt (Planet X), Gordon Murdoch (Pedalpower.org.uk) and Richard Cartland (Team Corley Cycles) went away with just six miles covered, and by the first hot spot sprint of the day at Crosshill had gained an advantage of 49 seconds over the peloton. As Lovatt took the prime, Cartland was dropped and would retire from the race by the 27 mile mark.

The modified route saw the first Carrick Gazette King of the Mountains prime contested within sight of the magnificently restored Cloncaird Castle, with Murdoch collecting maximum points. His team mate Gary Hand, wearing the Polka Dot jersey, added to his lead with a fourth place on the climb but ultimately he was unable to defend his position and the final winner of the classification – and best Under 23 rider – was Ian Bibby of the ScienceinSport-Trek squad.

The leading riders advantage yo-yoed between 20 and 40 seconds as the very active peloton saw the teams with riders in contention for GC working hard to limit any loss. As the race turned left to start the climb of Hadyard Hill the break came to an end as the main field swept them up, and almost as quickly split into two groups with the yellow jersey of Downing leading the charge. The final selection had now been made and the twenty three man leading group contained virtually all the riders who were in with a chance of securing the overall victory.

The final classified climb of 'The Screws' saw the lead consolidated as the remains of the peloton rapidly lost ground. As the race sped back into Girvan to contest the Victory Park Hot Spot Sprint, 4 riders attacked the lead group. Kristian House (a former Girvan winner) was there for Rapha Condor-Recycling, as was Liam Holohan (Pearl Izumi), Andrew Bye (Sigmasport) and Tom Southam (Halfords Bikehut). Cresting Byne Hill on the outskirts of the town more riders bridged across to the leaders, however yellow jersey Russell Downing was not one of them.

Kristian House was the best placed rider in the breakaway - starting the day 1:06 behind Downing. With the prospect of time bonuses for the first three over the finish line, there was a very real possibility that Downing could lose the race in the final miles if the House group could gain sufficient time.

At the finish line House took the stage and the 15 second bonus, clearly happy with his first big win since his return to UK racing. However with the yellow jersey group coming home only 37 seconds down it was enough to ensure that Downing would win the race that he had led since the first day. With two stage wins along the way it was an emphatic victory for the Pinarello RT rider and he was clearly delighted with his performance and that of his team when interviewed on the podium.

There was some consolation for the other big teams as Rapha Condor-Recycling took the team award along with second on GC for Rob Partridge and fourth for House. Plowman Craven secured third overall thanks to Simon Richardson whilst there was further success for Pinarello as Peter Williams retained the Endura-Tal Hot Spot Sprints jersey.

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So the 2008 Girvan defied the weather and provided another thrilling race. With it's future secure thanks to a five year deal with main sponsor Scottish Power Renewables, the event will celebrate it's 40th edition in 2009.

Meanwhile the Premier Calendar competition, with one win each so far for brothers Dean and Russell Downing, continues with The Tour of the Reservoir on Sunday 30th March.