

40th Girvan 3 Day Cycle Race promoted by Wallacehill Cycling Club

Stage 4: Girvan – Girvan, 72 miles

The General Classification going into the fourth and final stage of the 2009 Girvan showed five riders within 25 seconds of the leader Tom Murray (Plowman Craven-Madison), with most of the major teams represented. Andy Tennant (Halfords Bikehut), winner of the Tour of the Reservoir was lying third at 15 seconds with Simon Richardson (Rapha Condor) fourth at the same time and Candi-TV Pinarello's Peter Williams in fifth at 25 seconds. The wildcard at the top of the classification was second place Marcin Bialoblocki (Sports Beans Wilier), 10 seconds down on Murray and riding as part of the composite Team E12. Surely it would be difficult for the tall Polish born rider to maintain or even better his position against the strength of the big teams also looking for the ultimate podium place?

Another perfect spring day greeted the departure of the 99 remaining riders from Girvan, set to cover 72 miles over challenging terrain with 3 first category climbs to be tackled along the route. The pattern set on the previous stages, with attacks almost from the off, continued as the field anticipated the first King of the Mountains climb at Penkill coming at just 2.1 miles. Maximum points were collected by the polka dot jersey of Ian Bibby (Team Halfords Bikehut) with his nearest challenger in the climbing competition, Gary Hand (Endura Racing) taking second.

Dropping down the twisty and technical descent into Barr - known locally as 'The Screws' - Tony Gibb (Plowman Craven-Madison) was the first abandon of the day as his remaining team-mates drove hard at the front to aid yellow jersey Murray, whilst Bialoblocki punctured and had to apply maximum effort to regain the peloton after receiving service.

Tackling the first category climb at Glenella with 12 miles gone, the first significant advantage was gained as three riders went clear. Accompanying Stage 2 winner Graham Briggs (Candi-TV Pinarello) were Dan Craven (Rapha Condor) and Marc Perry (Plowman Craven-Madison). Craven couldn't maintain contact as the road sloped up and as quickly as he was dropped the remaining two were joined by King of the Mountains leader Bibby. Following the descent and on the run in to the first Hot Spot Sprint of the day at Kirkmichael, it was Perry who was now despatched back to the peloton who by now were almost 1 minute behind the two leaders.

As Plowman Craven-Madison policed the front of the peloton, Murray's position wasn't seriously threatened by the breakaway's with Bibby 2:34 down on GC and Briggs at 20:22. Meanwhile the leaders advantage was increasing through the prime line at Crosshill where Briggs took the hot spot, and by the 30 mile mark the peloton were 1:22 behind. As the race sped through the crossroads at Cloyntie Toll a major crash felled a significant number of riders and the chasing group was split in two. Gary Hand came off worst of the crash victims and his race ended with a trip to hospital.

However none of the main contenders were affected by the crash, and the breakaway's advantage started to fall away quickly with Kristian House particularly active in reeling them in. As the race turned left on to Hadyard Hill, so often a decisive point in previous editions of the Girvan, the leaders were caught as the road went upwards once again. With Rapha Condor now driving hard, Tom Southam took first place across the prime line with Bibby again scoring a second place and increasing his grip on the climbers jersey.

By now the race was well and truly split asunder and just 35 riders made up the lead group whilst the back markers were more than 8 minutes behind. An attack by Russell Downing (Candi-TV Pinarello) on the descent was soon neutralised and Murray still looked comfortable riding near the front of the peloton. With barely 4 miles between Hadyard Hill and the final climb of the race, Nick o' the Balloch, more riders were shed as the high pace continued and Rapha Condor scored another

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KoM victory with Peter Williams crossing the summit in first place with Andy Tennant showing he has the legs for a big climb by taking second.

As the riders descended and then climbed again over Tairlaw Summit a new lead group of 16 riders had formed. Yellow jersey Murray had missed the move and found himself in a split peloton which soon lost more than 30 seconds on the lead group which included his main challengers Downing, Tennant, Williams and Bialoblocki. Sensing the opportunity to further distance Murray the leaders set a relentless pace and the group was down to 10 members by the final hot spot sprint in Straiton. Krisitan House was first across the prime line, enough to ensure that he would be declared the winner of the green jersey Endura Sprints competition, whilst Bialoblocki was now the yellow jersey on the road as Murray's group fell further behind.

Girvan winner in 2007 Ian Wilkinson (Team Halfords Bikehut) again showed what a strong rider he is by attacking the lead group as the roads finally flattened on the run back to Girvan. His move was countered by Russell Downing and soon the two had a 15 second advantage and this had increased to 22 seconds with just 5 miles to go. Downing showed he was the stronger sprinter, just beating Wilkinson across the line, meanwhile House finished in third place as Tennant led in the next group containing Bialoblocki who, arms aloft, knew he had done enough to deny his nearest challengers and take the final yellow jersey of the race.

With Bibby secure in the Carrick Gazette King of the Mountains competition it was some consolation for Halfords Bikehut to win the Team Classification, and further proof of Tennant's form as he took not only the second place overall but also the Pete Longbottom award for best Under 23 rider in the race. Peter Williams rounded off his excellent performance throughout the race by taking 3rd place on the winners podium.

Speaking after the presentation ceremony, Bialoblocki was clearly delighted by his first major win - particularly in the face of potentially much stronger teams - and was already looking forward to resuming battle at the East Midlands CiCLe Classic in two weeks time.

So the 40th Girvan came to a close and the final word went to race organiser Ian Sinclair who couldn't have wished for a better outcome - top class racing, enthusiastic supporters and three days of perfect spring weather. With the backing of main event sponsor Scottish Power Renewables secure for at least a further two years, and excellent support from local Police ensuring the safe passage of the race, the Girvan can only go from strength to strength as the next chapter in its long history unfolds.