

Stage 1: Girvan – Girvan, 71.4 miles

The warm Easter sunshine greeted a field of more than 100 riders to contest the 36th running of the Girvan 3 Day Cycle Race. With support from new main sponsors Girvan Horizons, and under the control of new organiser Ian Sinclair, the race rolled out of Girvan and straight onto the first King of the Mountains prime of the day at Byne Hill. Second overall twelve months previously, Julian Winn (Pinarello RT) made his intentions clear by taking the points at the top of the climb. The brisk pace saw five riders dropped by the time the race reached Pinwherry after just 7 miles and this signalled the first significant attack of the stage with Leigh Cowell (Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power) going clear with Mark Lovatt (Planet X), Julian Ramsbottom (De Rosa RT), Jeffrey Capper (Cycle Trade) and Paul Coats (Glasgow Couriers).

The group gained a maximum of 18 seconds on the fast moving peloton before being brought back shortly before the first Hot Spot Sprint of the day – sponsored by Geoffrey Butler Cycles - at Barrhill which was taken by Russell Downing of Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power. With 25 miles covered the race turned towards Glentool and the long ascent to Tairlaw summit. It was at this point that the major attack of the day took place. 2004 overall victor Malcolm Elliott went clear in the company of Kevin Dawson (Planet X RT), Matt Brammeier (GB Under 23) and Dean Downing (Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power). They were quickly joined by Dean's brother and team mate Russell, and at Straiton with 41 miles covered their advantage stood at more than one minute over a split peloton.

As the race powered back into Girvan, Russell Downing took the second Hot Spot Sprint at Victory Park before tackling Byne Hill for the second time. The news came that Planet X rider Mark Lovatt was driving the peloton and as Russell Downing secured the second Carrick Gazette sponsored King of the Mountains prime the damage had been done and the leaders advantage was now down to 36 seconds.

With just 10 miles to the finish, Dean Downing attacked and quickly opened a gap of 15 seconds over his breakaway companions with the main field a further 29 seconds back. By Old Dailly, and with inside 5 miles to go, the race was all back together and the prospect of a bunch sprint awaited the large crowd gathered on the Girvan seafront. As the race came into sight on the finish straight on Henrietta Street it seemed that the Pinarello team mates of Julian Winn and Malcolm Elliott were best positioned to take the sprint, but they had to settle for second and third as an attack on the right hand side of the road by John Tanner – winner of the Girvan in 2003 – secured him the victory and the first yellow jersey of the race by the narrowest of margins.

Stage 2 – Victory Park Criterium 16.5 miles

With British Summertime still some hours away, the start time of the criterium stage around Victory Park was brought forward to 5.30pm to beat the encroaching darkness. With just a couple of hours to recover after their efforts earlier in the day, the riders lined up to contest 15 laps of the popular circuit, punctuated by two hot spot sprints sponsored by BAE Systems.

With the riders powering away from the line, Colin Pearson (Deeside Thistle CC) suffered the ultimate indignity of falling off before turning a pedal and was destined to chase in vain for the rest of the stage. After just two laps Tom White (GB Under 23) and Robin Sharman (Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power) went on the attack encouraged by the large crowds lining the barriers in the finishing straight. This was soon followed by a move from White's team mate Matt Brammeier and Steven Higgins (Composite B).

Once the junction had been made the four worked well together and gradually increased their advantage to almost 40 seconds. Despite attacks from Dean Downing and Julian Winn the leaders never looked in danger of being caught as they continued to sweep up the back markers.

Coming to the line for the final time, it was Brammeier who launched the decisive attack and went clear to secure the victory with arms aloft.

With race leader Tanner back in the main field, the yellow jersey moved to the shoulders of Robin Sharman along with the green Points jersey. George Miller, director of stage sponsors Active Office Scotland and himself a former organiser of the Girvan race was present to hand out the prizes.

The action continues on Easter Sunday with the longest stage of the race covering almost 85 miles, and taking in some roads previously unused in the events illustrious 36 year history.

Stage 3: Girvan – Minnigaff, 84.6 miles

Stage 3 of the Girvan celebrated the arrival of British Summer Time with the longest stage of the race and the prospect of covering roads never before used in the 36 year history of the event. The Girvan Horizons Yellow Jersey of race leader was on the shoulders of Robin Sharman following his second place in the Victory Park Criterium the previous evening, but with only a maximum of 38 seconds separating the top 20 riders on GC his Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power team would have to work hard to defend it.

Making a discrete exit from the town to preserve the peace of Sunday morning, the riders were once again faced with the climb of Byne Hill as soon as the neutralised flag was pulled in. With weather conditions cooler than the previous day many set out wearing capes and windproof jackets and unfortunately the numbers of the first and third riders over the King of the Mountains prime could not be seen.

By the time the Barrhill Hot Spot sprint was reached after 11 miles, three riders had eased off the front of the peloton and it was Evan Oliphant (Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power) who took the prime ahead of his teammate Russell Downing and Paul Coats (Glasgow Couriers). Their lead was short lived however and the race swiftly came back together although the intense activity continued at the head of the peloton.

With 23 miles gone, what turned out to be the only significant break of the day went away and soon established itself as the race headed through the eventual finish line in Minnigaff, albeit in the opposite direction. At the Hot Spot sprint it was Lee Whitelaw (Composite 'A') who took the points ahead of his breakaway companions Julian Ramsbottom (De Rosa RT), Philip Spencer (GB Under 23), Paul Rennie (North Beach Hotel RT), James McCallum (Viner Bikes/Agisko), Stuart McGregor (C21 Multisport RT), Scott Gamble (Composite 'B') and Ben Greenwood (Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power).

As the race turned off the A75 and headed towards Creetown the leaders had more than 1½ minutes over two chasers Roger Morgan (O&S Combine) and Alastair Kay (Late Arrivals) with the peloton almost two minutes behind.

Cresting the Pibble Hill King of the Mountains prime, Paul Rennie took the points by which time the peloton were almost 4 minutes down with two chasing groups making little progress on the leaders. With panoramic views across the Fleet Valley – backdrop for several major films and television series - the route twisted through Gatehouse of Fleet and began the climb of Bengray Hill. At this point Ben Greenwood was the yellow jersey on the road as the peloton fell back by more than five minutes.

An attack by fifteen riders – including all the leading jersey wearers - was launched with 53 miles gone. Although short lived it clearly signalled the peloton's intention not to allow the leaders to prevail, and by Mossdale the Recycling squad were driving the chase. The final hill prime of the day, at New Galloway, was taken by Greenwood and shortly after he launched an attack in the company of Scott Gamble as the remaining members of the lead group began to be reeled in by the peloton. Passing the 15 miles to go marker the junction was made, leaving Greenwood and Gamble clear with an advantage of just one minute.

Rather than trying to maintain their advantage, Greenwood sat up – obviously under team orders – much to the annoyance of Gamble. However the die had been cast and with less than ten miles to go the race came back together, quickly followed by a new attack from all the key players including the yellow jersey of Sharman. The prospect of a bunch sprint at the line in Minnigaff was now almost inevitable and as the race came into sight of the crowd lining the barriers at the finish, it was the green points jersey of Russell Downing that led the sprint across the line. Second place went to John Tanner, who had already tasted victory on stage one, whilst stage two winner Matt Brammeier secured third.

Even the stage win time bonuses were not enough to deny another yellow jersey for Sharman who finished comfortably in the bunch. The King of the Mountains jersey moved to Paul Rennie by virtue of his two victories on the road whilst Russell Downing retained the green points jersey.

The final stage of the 2005 race gets underway at 11.00am on Easter Monday with the fearsome prospect of the Nick o' Balloch to be tackled on the route back to Girvan which will see the winner of the race finally decided.

Stage 4: Girvan – Girvan, 77.2 miles

The effects of some heavy overnight rain and the prospect of climbing the notorious Nick O' Balloch meant that the final 77.2 mile stage would not be an easy run for the remaining 87 riders who took the start.

Rolling out of Girvan, Robin Sharman (Recycling.co.uk) held the yellow jersey by a slender 3 seconds from Steven Higgins (Combine B) with Great Britain's Under 23 prospects Thomas White and Matt Brammeier lying third and fourth respectively, and John Tanner – overall winner in 2003 – still a major threat in fifth. In fact the top 37 riders on GC were all within 1 minute of the leader.

The pace was high in the opening 15 miles and at least 17 riders were dropped as the race headed for Barr, though - due to roadworks – not via the usual descent of 'The Screws'. A 10 strong attack, including big hitters Matt Stephens (Composite A), Julian Winn (Pinarello RT), Kevin Dawson (Planet X) and Dean Downing (Recycling.co.uk/MG X Power) were quickly joined by the yellow jersey Sharman, Mark Lovatt (Planet X) and Matt Brammeier amongst others – but the peloton would not let them go and they were all back together as the race headed towards the lower slopes of 'The Nick'. No sooner was the junction made than Winn and Russell Downing (Recycling.co.uk) attacked – Winn's intention clearly to regain the King Of the Mountains jersey taken from his shoulders the previous day by Paul Rennie.

As Winn secured the prime, the peloton split on the climb and Planet X drove the chase on the descent. With temperatures on Tairlaw summit dipping as low as 5 degrees Celcius the two leaders were swept up as the race roared into Straiton and immediately onto the final KOM climb of Largs Hill. Another first place for Winn secured him the polka dot jersey in the Carrick Gazette King of the Mountains competition.

With the climbing done and the race swinging onto the A713, Malcolm Elliott (Pinarello RT), Russell Downing, Kevin Dawson, Ross Muir (Viner Bikes), Simon Richards (GB Under 23) and Matt Stephens (Composite A) launched an attack and had gained an advantage of 1.04 by the time Downing took the Hot Spot Sprint at Patna and also went on to take the final Sprint at Dalrymple to secure the green points jersey in the Geoffrey Butler sponsored points competition.

Evan Oliphant (Recycling.co.uk), Duncan Urquhart (Viner Bikes) and Lovatt attacked from the peloton on the road to Kirkmichael but were quickly brought back – the leaders' advantage standing at 1.47 with just 20 miles to go. But thoughts that this might be the decisive move were quickly revised as a flurry of attacks swiftly eat into the lead. And foremost among those making the running were those with the yellow jersey in their sights - John Tanner, Robin Sharman and Matt Brammeier.

As the leading group's advantage fell to inside 15 seconds – and with just 17 miles to the finish – Kevin Dawson attacked and quickly opened up a 20 second lead. The Best British Allrounder for the past two years, he would need all of his time trial skills if he was to put sufficient time into the now rampant peloton and take the yellow jersey.

Still clear - but by an swiftly narrowing margin - the race turned into Girvan at 'the white cottage' with Elliott, Tanner and Brammeier leading the charge. However swinging around a tight bend onto the finishing circuit at Victory Park, a slip of wheels at the front of the peloton brought several riders down and impeded the progress of some others. Meanwhile Dawson, cheered on by the crowd, only just held off his pursuers at the line to take the stage victory.

Overall victory was less clear cut, and initially Tanner thought that he had done enough to secure the jersey with the time bonus for second place. However as the crash occurred in the final 1km, those riders who were affected were credited with the same time as the winner and therefore the jersey stayed on the

shoulders of Robin Sharman – much to the delight of himself and his team mates. Steven Higgins (Composite B) sealed a successful weekend for himself by taking third overall on General Classification.

Thomas White took the Best Under 23 rider award and his Great Britain Under 23 team also took the best team prize. With Glasgow Couriers man Paul Coats finishing as best 2/3/4 category rider, the line up on the podium was complete and the crowd saluted the winners of another successful Girvan 3 Day.

Race organiser Ian Sinclair declared himself happy with the weekend and was already looking forward to working with Girvan Horizons again on his plans for the 37th edition of the race.