

High Rising XDH

Contributed by Justin Boast
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High Rising XDH:

Let me give you a bit of background on this sweet hill called High Rising. Nestled between pine forests, fynbos and Martian-like landscape, it's situated off the N2 highway just outside Grabouw, a 90-minute drive out of Cape Town. Grabouw, is a mid-sized town famous for its cultivation of apples, pears, plums and other deciduous fruit. But just 2km after the large KROMCO apple factory and 4km off the main N2 highway lies the Houwteq complex, a little dark secret of the Apartheid era. (Now I get to the point where I ask myself, "How did I even get to this, and do we need to go into it?" But considering downhill skateboarders bomb hills, it's all a bit relevant.)

After doing my first race at the High Rising hill in 2004 and attending the four that followed after that, it was only in 2006, while I was getting my arm tattooed by Simon White, former SAGRA member and co-owner of the Wildfire tattoo parlours, that I got to hear about the Houwteq company. Considering back then that Simon White lugged and was one of the original race organizers, naturally in my hour-long tattoo session we'd be talking about downhill racing. While sitting in the chair and in deep conversation trying to distract my mind from the three needles that were piercing my skin with black ink, we got to chatting about Houwteq and what the facility was really used for. All I could remember hearing was "top-secret military facility that manufactured long-range missiles and some type of satellite-destroying technique." The Houwteq facility was watched by the CIA, and eventually with the new government coming into play in 1994, Houwteq was shut down completely in the 1990s. The complex has stood still like a ghost town for years; they say that everything was left as it was. Now a complex that was once used to manufacture bombs of mass destruction has been discovered by downhillers, who coincidentally just wanted to, well, bomb hills really fast on their skateboards.

The cool thing about the hill in the Houwteq complex is that there are two roads that lead to the top, one we named High Rising and the other Houwteq. Both demand respect. Actually if my memory served me right (which it did not), I remembered the High Rising hill to be a touch more tame than its counterpart on the other side – which has this mean drop and with a tailwind can be real heart-stopping hill. That's why when we got the OK to host an event on the hill after not being able to since 2006, the High Rising side came to mind as the perfect hill for the first race of 2009.

The course starts at the top with a short push into a tight right-hand, then the hill banks to the left as you fly down the hill, and in the middle we planned on putting a hay-bale chicane. Exiting the chicane, the hill drops one more time before you have to set yourself up for the tight left before the finish and negotiate the "High Rising Dip" that is smack bam in the middle of the left. (More on the Dip later.)

All the SAGRA members were amped knowing we were returning to this awesome location, and we set about organizing the race. The dates were set for the first weekend of May. Unfortunately, three days prior to the event we checked the weather for the weekend and rain was forecast for both Saturday and Sunday. Luckily with 3 days still to go we made the decision to postpone and let all the riders know that the event would take place the following weekend. We had a 50/50 chance that we'd have a perfect weekend to race on, and the decision paid off.

I woke up at 6:15 Saturday morning. We needed to get there early as we still had to set the course with the hay bales, and it took a good hour and 30 minutes to get there. Upon arriving at the Houwteq complex we were greeted with a solid SW tailwind blowing perfectly down the course. This was already a concern, knowing that at the end of the course riders would have to negotiate the last tight left before the finish, and it was going to be fast. After doing a quick course check we went about setting up the chicane – nothing better than packing out 200 hay bales to get the blood flowing before everyone arrives. In the time that it took us to get the course ready, most of the riders had arrived.

With the marshals and medics in place we got the morning practice on its way. That's when it started to happen: red flag, rider down by marshal 3 on the last tight left. The speeds were way faster than when we had been there last in 2005, and with the tailwind the speeds had turned up a notch more. The riders were flying down the course, and meters before the last left had to do some heavy footbraking. The soles of their shoes were getting worn out fast, and negotiating the High Rising Dip was a challenge. The High Rising Dip is a dip in the middle of the last left, which has a lip

so if you go in with too much speed, the dip will pop you out and into the bails. You could literally see the back wheels of some riders getting airborne out of the dip, followed by a hay bale hugging session.

By lunch time, though, the wind had dropped, which brought much relief to many riders' shoes. In qualifiers Richard Dweza took the number 1 spot in the Skateboard category, taking solid runs down the High Rising hill and perfecting his lines. Russell Naude was on top form and took the first spot in luge. With Saturday's riding over, many riders went home beaten by the High Rising Dip, picking hay out of places you could not even imagine and contemplating methods of repairing the soles of their shoes.

Sunday morning we returned to High Rising with fewer riders, Saturday's riding on the tricky last left had taken its toll. Decio Lourenco had a sprained ankle, Dave Hort had a damaged shoulder, Amin Gray had a bad wipeout that shook him up and newcomer Chris Bowes had to sacrifice some skin and blood to the skate Gods, which left him unable to compete on Sunday. With the tailwind still present, it was going to be all-out, balls to the wall racing.

With only a few lugers competing, they decided on the GP race format for Sunday's racing. Russell Naude dominated all the GP heats to win in the Luge category, ahead of Brian Isham (2nd) and Glen Phillips (3rd). Warren Smith came in at fourth and looked some what happy seconds before crashing into the hay-bales. In the Skateboard finals Richard Dweza took a solid lead from the start, with Alex Duss and Ben Malherde close behind. Richard charged into the High Rising Dip, scrubbing off his speed through the left and making a clean exit to take his first-ever IGSA-sanctioned race. Alex tried to take Ben on in the inside of the last left but made contact with Ben, and both crashed into the hay bales. Josh Smit, who was in fourth, negotiated the carnage to come in at 2nd place in his first finals.

Richard Dweza has since booked his ticket to compete in this year's European leg of the IGSA World Cup series. Richard is one of the most stoked riders out there and is amped to be competing with some of the best riders in Europe.

The weekend's racing was over, and with everyone surviving what was meant to be an intermediate hill, nobody cared at the end of the weekend; there was just stoke in the air. The first SAGRA race of the year was over; the racing had been intense, and the riders loved it. Houwteq, here we come again – Round Two!

Thanks to everyone who helped us make this event possible: the first-time marshals; Chris Lubbe, who helped with race directing on Saturday; and "That Guy" Alladin Morgan, who took charge of the race directing on Sunday and ran a smooth race.