

'Fish Report: Maryhill 09

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The third year for the Maryhill Festival of Speed didn't disappoint: 5 days of great riding with skaters from around the world on a great road. This year, rains brought a new set of strategies to the hill, and the results were beyond anyone's expectations. Our correspondent spent 10 hours on the road, and timed his arrival for sunrise on the last day of racing. Here's his report...

The 'Fish Report: Maryhill '09

I woke up at around 6 am, reached for the steering wheel and pulled myself up. I sat with the energy that three hours of sleep in a car can give, leaned against the wheel and looked around. I had driven through the night, ten hours, 2 provinces and 2 states. It was great to see where I was and not just the map on the GPS. The rising sun unveiled the Columbia River Gorge, it was magnificent, a dramatic segue into a dramatic day of racing.

I met John Ozman as he opened the gate to the hill, already on his cell phone captaining the ship. He graciously welcomed me and we drove up to the base camp, already alive with hurried activity. It was great to have a moment to talk with John, hear about how the week was going and the expectations for the day and for the future. Soon, riders arrived wiping the sleep out of their eyes and assembled to hear the announcements for the day. I just stood back and watched everybody crowd in, Marcus and John belting out the instructions for the day, answering questions and laughing with the riders, everybody heckling each other. I watched riders lazily walk through their morning routine, watched them arrive quiet and half asleep and then come alive as they wandered up to the racing bracket sheets. I watched thrilled parents snapping photos of their kids, piles of junior racers striking poses, spectators slowly climbing the hill loaded with gear, music echoing through the tight valley, giant windmills leaning over the hills, slowly coming alive in the morning breeze. Maryhill was a place where everyone looked to be at home, all stoked over the same thing, all itching to get to the top.

The U-Hauls crawled up the black winding road bloated with racers, spilling out the back and off the sides. The morning sun was warm, the breeze was cool and the hills were quiet. Racers took their warm up runs and I hung around at the top of the course, listened and watched. There were more junior racers this year than ever before. They hassled each other as they suited up, some of them had many years to go before they filled out their leathers, some had pieced suits together, all of them a vibrant future for the sport. Their mentors towered over them, encouraging and cheering them on, teaching, coaching, sharing. Racers in all sizes, from all over the planet. Here they're a tight family, sharing and loving

every moment. I reluctantly headed downhill away from this irresistible culture and propped myself up inside a corner, in between the hay. I snapped shots from almost every corner, every stretch. The racing was vibrantly underway and it looked as if the sun was settling in but the clouds were not far off.

Dark clouds spilled over the hill tops and sank into the valley. The rain speckled the course and pulled back, the sun reappeared and dried it up but soon the wind threw the windmills into action, the rain returned and soaked everything. The weather blew in and out all day, forcing racers to constantly change their wheels. Some racers would start on a dry course and finish on soaked pavement. It was totally unpredictable, it was dangerous, it was awesome to watch. It was a rodeo. Riders flew off the course one after the other. Some threw fits and tantrums, dramatically frustrated with the conditions, others took it all in stride and loved the challenge and the change in riding style. Regardless, I was entertained and totally soaked. I stacked up hay bails and cowered in, the wind blowing the rain sideways. I was constantly hiding, peeking out, wiping my gear dry, hiding, peeking out, wiping my gear dry. The rain did slow things down and as a result the finals were raced in the faltering light of dusk. It was insane what the riders had to race through, definitely the most demanding and difficult conditions that Maryhill could offer. Absolutely, the most impressive display of adaptive ability, only the most experienced and seasoned riders were able to continue and even still, some of the best fell.

MFOS 09 was brilliant, completely unique and did not give it's prize easily. Everyone fought the elements but only Patrick Switzer and Brienne Davies mastered them. Brienne conquered the women's DH for the third time in a row, absolutely dominating the competition. Patrick left second to Silva and third to James Kelly. Brienne was followed by Dominique Vukorep in second and Glenna Evans in third. It was awesome to be a part of things, to be in the midst of it. I wish I could have been there throughout the whole week but even in this one day I could see how huge this sport is getting, how exciting the future is, how brilliant it's culture shines and what a joy it is to be a part of passing it on.

It was a dim, soaked Maryhill when Bricin's fanatical play by play of the finals crackled through the sound system. Bricin feverishly belted out the action from his viewpoint at the top of the course. Most of the spectators and media piled on top of each other at the finish line. We were like kids in front of an old radio, wide eyed and on the edge of our seat. Bricin was only able to commentate on a portion of each race because there was a point where he would lose sight of the

riders and there would be this horrible quiet, everyone peering on tiptoe up the hill, trying to catch a glimpse of who might be leading. The finals were unbearable. Would Scoot three-peat? Would Erban, the new record holder, carry on his dominating speed? We all were in silence listening to the action, the drama unfolding in our minds eye. And it sputtered out on the radio that Scoot and Erban went off course, everything burst into chaos. I had no idea what was going on, who was out in the lead, who would eat it after Bricin signed off and who would come out first into view? The whole hill erupted as Patrick Switzer flew into the straight stretch above us, Brazilian, Douglas Silva right on his heels. The crowd practically burst through the fencing and hay bails as Swiss leaned over the line just ahead of Silva. And in Maryhill tradition, the winner was engulfed by the crowd instantly. Patrick was lifted to the shoulders of his friends, hoisted into the bliss of his supremacy, flag proudly overhead, friends clambering to join in. And as soon as he was let down to his feet Patrick was tackled and planted with one of the best victory kisses ever.

All words and images by Dustin Heigh / Emblem Photography. Dustin's a pro, if you can't tell already, so visit his website if you'd like to see more of what he does. Just click around all the soft, wedding photos and you'll see he's an accomplished action photographer (as if the set here doesn't prove that). Dustin was our man on the road for MFOS '09 and we hope you feel the stoke! Silverfish Longboarding supports all forms of skateboard racing and we gotta remind you: if you ain't skatin' fast enough to need a lid, skate faster and put on your lid!