

Race Report: IGSA goes to

Contributed by easyrider2004
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This race report comes to us from Riley "RJ" Meehan, the 15-year old, multi-discipline gravity racer from Southern California on his first IGSA European racing circuit.

Åre, Sweden, the site of the 2007 World Cup Ski events, showed its colors for the 2006 IGSA World Cup event when riders from 15 countries converged in the small mountain town for the race. Monday practice started promptly, after a more-or-less organized riders meeting in the Åre Mountain Games town square. It was a nice change to have practice start at 4 PM instead of earlier in the morning, because it gave lots of time to go around, check out the town, and meet other interesting riders.

Practice was set from 4 PM to 10 PM because, if you didn't know, the sun Doesn't set until 10 PM and it's still light outside past midnight! Pretty much the perfect place for a bunch of gravity junkies to have a race and party all night! Petter Österling, the event organizer, informed the riders that the two buses were here to take everyone to the hill, and without much ado, a caravan of riders were heading to the location of the race course.

The Race Course: it's a unique combination of high-speed straights and turns, and two tight hairpins; one leading just to the finish line for some very exciting heats. The start was on a mild slope, so a good push did you very well in many cases. Then it slowly swept left, becoming moderately tighter as the speeds progressed. This gentle turn was nothing in the dry. But, in the rain and if taken without care, the turn could cost you the race, and maybe your limbs, too! Following the mild left, hard braking was required in order to quickly dive into a lengthy, right hand hairpin. The straight then progressed 100 yards into another mild left that was only critical when raining. 250 yards further down the hill was a mild right into the last left hand hairpin, which resulted in a complicated situation, requiring quick late-braking in the off-cambered right and then a dive into the left hairpin which had rough asphalt on the inside of the corner, and smoother asphalt on the outside. Less than 20 yards after the left hairpin was the steep finish line, which was the scene for many wild braking accidents for the speedborders.

Practice and Qualifying. All week, the freeride/practice went very safely, but for a few mild accidents and one more serious accident. On Tuesday, the second day of freeride, an easygoing run with Chris McBride, Marc Dean, Beni Weber, and David Dean went south during the last, 60 mph straight. Marc went to make a quick maneuver around Chris McBride, and then Marc's front bumper got hooked up with Chris's rear wheel. Chris flipped as his luge spun out of control, but Marc made it by safely. Unfortunately, as the accident was taking place, David Dean and Beni Weber were passing on either side of the other two riders. McBride's luge got caught up with David Dean and he went sideways. Beni made it by safely, but quickly stopped to see if anyone was hurt. David had gone sideways and thought he would just ride it off in the gravel and come to a stop. Little did he know that he was riding right into a driveway on the side of the road. He went down the driveway and then back up again. Launching him and the luge into the air! He bailed off his ride to make sure he wasn't anywhere near the luge when he landed, and came tumbling toward the ground, left foot first. On contact with the hard earth, he snapped the top ligaments in his left foot. Stuck in the woods, where no one could find him…

McBride went to the corner marshal to see if anyone else was in the accident, but they knew nothing. Walking back to the scene of where everything went down, he heard screaming off in the woods. It was David, hollering for some assistance, so McBride went down to help Dean back up the road. At the bottom of the hill, Marc Dean was worried because he was sure that Chris was hurt after not seeing him come down. When we went up in the bus and saw that Chris was awkwardly positioned on the ground, Marc insisted the bus driver stop so he could go see what happened. The reason Chris was so awkwardly positioned on the ground was because David Dean was in his lap in pain, after being dragged up the hill. The paramedics were called, and after a 20-minute delay, Dean was on his way to the hospital and freeride resumed. He's going to be alright, but it was certainly an example of how even little things can go very wrong in an instant.

Of course, after 3 days perfect weather for practice, there was no way that the weather was going to stay that good for qualifying! After more than 70 speedboarders took their two qualifying runs. It started to rain, and streetluge was allowed to go. The lugers got one warm-up run and then took their qualifying runs. The first qualifying runs no longer had rain, but the road was still soaked. Everyone took a safe run and no one got hurt. Then Aki showed up to race standup, without any practice, but still needed to take a qualifier. He took his first in the pouring rain. Next, the lugers ran their second qualifying. The road was getting drier as the day went on, so the later you qualified, the better off you were. Everyone had a safe run, including David Dean and Petter Österling, both skating injured, but they wanted the points.

The only crash was Riley Meehan in the final left hairpin! I slid from a controlled wet slide, into the dry road, where my luge flipped. I quickly jumped back on, but still was the last qualifier that would be riding in the race. Aki then took his final qualifier and qualified 3rd of more than 70 riders, with only one practice run, his first qualifying run, in the pouring rain.

The top 3 qualifiers for streetluge were: 1st Loïc Zaccaro, with an impressive lead, 2nd John Fryer, 3rd Tyler Wendtland. Buttboard qualified right after luge and the road was dry again. Qualifying finished at 11 PM and most everyone went home to get a good night's sleep for race day.

Race Day. We had a riders' meeting at 11 AM and then went to the hill and started the first warm-up run for standup at noon. The brackets for racing hadn't shown up yet, so standup took one more warm-up run. Then the race brackets came up the hill in the hands of Petter and they started the first heats of racing. Unfortunately, half way through the 70 riders we found out there was an error. 3 riders were in heats twice and 3 riders weren't included in any of the heats. So, they brought the riders back up the hill, and everyone got to sit and wait for a while. An hour went by without anything. Finally, they decided to send Women's Standup. The women were all fast! Most of them could easily beat half the men racing and I'd love to see stateside women racers like Midge and Judith Rogers run with these ladies. Another 15 minutes went by. They sent Gravity Bike and Dirtsurfer classes down the hill, while we waited. 45 minutes later, with no sign of anything for standup, Petter came rushing up the hill with brackets for streetluge and said that they were going to run streetluge!

Six of the first eight heats only had two riders, so they had a practice run because they automatically proceeded to the next heat. The two other heats contained 3 riders. The first heat consisted of Beni Weber, Paul Busse, and Marc Dean. Going into the last corner everyone was very tight and Marc Dean decided that if he was going to go on to the next heat he needed to go all in. He came in hot on Paul Busse in the last corner, hoping to pass, he slid out, then toppled over and it was over for him. The other heat was Dave Auld, Felix Meier, and Riley Meehan. Going into the last left hairpin it was Auld, Meehan, and Meier. Auld and Meehan went on to the next heat. Each heat quickly progressed, putting the better riders on top. The first semi-final was Paul Busse (US), Chris McBride (US), Loïc Zaccaro (FR), and Eugen Forschner (DE). Zaccaro and Forschner won the heat going on to the final. The second semi-final consisted of John Fryer (US), Tyler Wendtland (US), Riley Meehan (US), and François Février (FR). Into the last straight-away, it was Fryer and Wendtland, closely being drafted by Meehan and Février. Meehan drafted Wendtland and going into the last hairpin it was Fryer, Meehan, Wendtland, Février, all very tight. Wendtland tried to late brake and cut on the inside to make the cut, but Fryer and Meehan went on to the final. Coming out of the last corner during the consolation final, Wendtland and Février, going in a little too quickly, got hooked up and crashed, giving the consi win to a very proud Paul Busse, followed by Chris McBride.

Riding up in the bus, Fryer and I strategized about how we were going to get at least two Americans on the podium. The final was an intense mix of drafting, passing, and team riding. Coming out of the push in a straight line Loïc had a clear lead, followed by Fryer, Forschner, and me. All the way down into the first right hairpin, this was the order of the riders. I cut Forschner on the inside and was drafting Fryer tight all the way down, giving little bumps with my feet all the way down to the bottom. Forschner tried to make a pass on the outside of Fryer and I, and was coming up tight on Fryer. I gave it one last push to put Fryer back in second. Fryer then faked diving into the last hairpin way too early and then swept back to the outside, causing Forschner to break immediately, and putting him a little out of control. I cut Forschner tight on the inside and 10 feet before the finish line, Fryer turned around and gave him the thumbs up that we had got it. Loïc rode a very tight line the entire time and he never had trouble with anyone else in the heat. He definitely earned the first place and there wasn't much else that could be done! Great racing!

They finally finished the first heat of standup and it started to rain. Some of the standup riders thought it was too dangerous to ride in the rain, so the race organizers decided to send buttboard, in 6 man heats. Everyone ran very carefully and there was only one injury in the first heat: a hurt ankle, but the rider was able to go on and race standup right after. It finally started to dry up during the final, but it was still wet in most of the corners. The final included Beni Weber, John Fryer, Tyler Wendtland, Eugen Forschner, Matthias Lang, and Loïc Zaccaro. Due to the dry/wet conditions there was a lot of passing in the corners. Going into the first corner the order was Fryer, Forschner, Zaccaro, Weber, Lang, Wendtland, and coming out of the corner it was Fryer, Forschner, Wendtland, Zaccaro, Weber, Lang. Then, into the last corner Weber and Wendtland hooked up and both almost went down. The final result was in order was Fryer, Forschner, Lang, Zaccaro, Wendtland, and Weber.

Standup then ran their last heats of the day and it was dry for the semi and the final. The final was fast and smooth. There was drafting and passing all the way down, but it went very smoothly. Even with a total of less than ten runs down the hill, Aki still got 3rd place. The results were as follows: 1st Frederick Lindström, 2nd Erik Lundberg, and 3rd Aki Von Glasgow.

The after party/awards went well into the night. People said their good-byes and most are going to see each other next week in Switzerland at the IGSA World Championships!

Thanks for a great write-up, RJ!! Congratulations to you for your first European podium, and likewise to the Champions in every class! IGSA racing is the best in the world and Silverfish Longboarding is proud to cover it. For more photos, check out the Galleries!