

STAGE 1

B grade started civil enough with a tempo ride up the first climb out of town.

There was a bit of sorting out going on before the first KOM with riders showing their strength by pulling on the front whereas others were happy to sit in.

As it turned out the first KOM was decisive with the young climbers tearing the peleton apart. James Boal easily won the first KOM followed by Xavier Gstrein and James Rendall. The rest of the pack just tried to get over the top without blowing up.

With 10km to go on the last lap there was a strong attack by Chris Eichler and Dion Blair. The move looked good and I bridged the gap and we worked together to get a few hundred meters on the rest of the pack.

As we turned onto the highway we managed to get the speed up around the 50 mark which I thought may extend our lead even further, however as we neared town to my surprise the pack had closed the gap thanks to some very big turns by one or two riders.

As soon as we reformed Dion Blair rolled off the front again and the pack was happy to see him disappear into the distance. In the end Dion was out of site and some of us expected that to be it. Dion won the next two KOM's without a challenge.

With maximum points having been taken by Dion I was expecting the pace to come off a little however the rest of the climbers were still keen on making everyone else suffer.

By the end of the last KOM the bunch had dwindled down from the 50 starters to around half that and with around 20km to go Dion was finally reeled in.

At this point the pace seemed to slack off a little so I decided to try my luck and rolled off the front. As the gap opened to 20 meters and the pack appeared not to respond I took the opportunity to go for home.

For the next 20km I was in the hot seat somewhere between blowing up, being caught and possibly winning the stage. In the end it was the win that came my way. The pack lost interest once the course turned onto the highway as the tailwind favoured the breakaway. In the end the win was mine by 40 seconds.

STAGE 2

With so much time up for grabs in the criterium the pressure was on from the start. 4 intermediate sprints with 20 seconds for the win meant anyone could be leading the race at the end of the criterium. But who was the strongest and best organized?

The bonus times for the sprints were shared around a bit which was all good news for the tour leader. At around the 30km mark a break of 3 got clear of the pack and cleaned up the last of the bonus sprints. The pack shut down in the last few laps and all of a sudden the 40 seconds lead gained in the first stage evaporated as the leading 3 riders ended up clear by 45 seconds.

Matt Fortuna took the win on stage 2 and was within 5 seconds of the lead by the end of the day. Thomas Donald was 2nd and Cameron Winton 3rd. Cameron ended the day in the top 5 and Thomas would have been there too but he had a bit of bad luck during stage 1.

STAGE 3

The third and final stage had a bit of everything. It started in sunshine but soon turned into a classic white knuckle ride with torrential rain and strong cross winds making the going tough for all.

The start of the race was civil enough and we rolled around for quite a few kms without any real chances going clear. This all changed after a couple of showers and a few undulations. Tony Chandler tried his luck and rolled off the front for a look see. Once he was 200 meters clear a few chasers jumped off the front and before you knew it a strong bunch had formed and they soon started to roll turns to maximise their advantage over the rest of the pack.

I was content to let the bunch go as the guys closest to me were still within the main group. However as the break disappeared up the road all the guys in the move were practically leading the race on GC – nervous times.

As the rain and wind increased an organised chase started to take shape with a couple of the guys doing well on GC getting some help to try and reel in the break. At times during this chase it was almost impossible to see due to the rain. Effective breaking was nonexistent as carbon rims just don't want to stop in these conditions, pretty much a case of squint a bit more and try not to half wheel the guy in front. As it turned out the chase was without incident and we managed to close the gap ever so slightly.

As the course turned towards home a heavy cross wind came into play and cracked the chasing bunch wide open. The guys on the front of the chase group worked well together and the gap to the breakaway came down noticeably, to the point where it was just 200 meters. As often happens the chasing bunch turned off at this point and the break opened up again.

The last KOM was a non event as the break had cleaned up all the bonus points of the day. All good news as the GC contenders were all in the chase pack together. It didn't make the climb any easier with GC contenders intent on gaining time on each other.

Matt Fortuna who had been the closest to the lead lost some time on the final climb of the day and had to settle for a spot just outside the top ten on GC. For the rest of the chasers it all came down to the last 5 km of the race with the breakaway being caught just before the decent into town. The decent is a bit hairy and the wet conditions made for a sketchy decent.

Steve Martin took a chance and although 'grassing it' on the first corner he managed to keep it upright and came in to win the stage just clear of a fast finishing Roy Clark and Thomas Donald with myself finishing 4th.

In the end I managed to hang on to the lead by 22 seconds over Cameron Winton with Xavier Gstrein 3rd, Roy Clark 4th and Steve Martin 5th.