



BLOG POST BY: MATTHEW LEWIS

## THE GOSHAWK CHALLENGE: WENTWOOD 50

9th March, 2011

Ornithology isn't my strong point but that is a Goshawk not that I would've seen one last Sunday at the Wentwood 50 I was too busy breathing out of my ears as Jay Horton would say. In fact it was due to the Horton's comments that I had to race. I'd made the mistake of posting about whether or not you should ride with a cold and got a barrage of abuse (quite rightly, for not being man enough).

I had been looking forward to this race for a while since despite having once lived in Chepstow and now in Monmouth I've never really ridden in Wentwood. There is so much quality riding around here, Forest of Dean on my doorstep; Cwmcarn 25 minutes away, the Black Mountains and the Beacons closer still that I've always just got on my bike and ridden around my usual haunts. This now though will change.



The race would prove to be a sell out and very well represented with some very quick riders. Most notably Matt Page of Wiggle and Johnny Pugh of KCNC and some other very speedy boys and girls. The race began with a longish tarmac climb that would be an excellent warm up for the legs and lungs. I'd managed to get myself into 7th position riding with Mark Spratt from Jif and a bloke in KCNC colours. I was coughing like a hag on this opening section so much so that even the KCNC bloke suggested that I may not make it up the climb never mind the whole way around the 50km. As I was thinking about this the tarmac thankfully gave way to fire road and by this stage Mark and Mr KCNC were beginning to pull away. I have to admit as wonderful as my Scott Scale is there are times when I miss my 29er. It just felt fast. In fact I may beg, cajole or steal for a day the 29er Anthem from Claire and Richard at Gateway cycles in Abergavenny just to see what the full susser is like.

The fireroad soon delivered us at the top of the first descent that would wake me up and shock my legs after a good 6km of steady climbing. By this stage all of the riders were still in view but becoming distant little fluorescent things. The course was a cracker and as usual difficult to relay in a blog but one of my favourite bits of the day around about the 12km mark was the lovely singletrack overlooking the Severn estuary. The pattern of the day was technical descent followed by more often than not a tough climb. In fact 1500m metres of climbing in 50km. All I can say is thank G-d it hadn't rained in the week leading up to the race it would've taken on epic proportions then due to the loamy, leafy trails at Wentwood. Just about the halfway mark I caught up with the KCNC rider who had had a problem with his chain but was then promptly caught by another rider dressed in the all-white KCNC jersey. It seems as if they were everywhere! I went through the first proper feed station with them and hit a difficult, fairly technical descent before hitting one of the most brutal climbs of the day, this thing just went on and on! I couldn't believe that I was in Wentwood. It was a real grind and by the top I was feeling it in my legs. By now I had been joined by another chap and the KCNC boys were just in front bobbing and weaving through the trees. I fell a little off the back and reckoned I was in 9th or 10th place. At the top of the climb we then followed a seriously muddy landrover track and this is where I excelled myself and took a wrong bloody turn. Such a wrong turn in fact that I found myself in front of Mark Spratt! Instead of retracing my steps I sped down the huge fireroad climb that the riders in front of me (in the race) were grinding up, some laughed others must've thought what a pratt. I got to the bottom and then knew that I had to go all the way back up it but it seemed the fairest thing to do. To be honest I don't think I was the only rider to take a wrong turn there. At the top of that climb my legs were beginning to show signs of cramp and I was a bit mad with myself for not paying enough attention to the markings.


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A very rocky descent then spat me out onto another climb. I didn't have a clue where I was by this stage and had resigned myself to just think of it as a nice day out in the sunshine but this climb went on again. I don't know where Robert Storey, the organiser was finding all of these climbs. At the top of the fire road there was a short tarmac section before yes, you've guessed it another short, stinger of a tarmac climb! Finally at the top of this one it was a sweet 7km descent to the finish. A mixture of quiet country lane and hardpacked mud singletrack.

I seriously underestimated this ride. It was tough but an awesome inaugural event from the organisers. I finished in 3hr 13 mins but had ended up doing an extra 5km according to my GPS. Nevermind, all good for the legs.

This enduro has all the makings of becoming an early season classic. A fantastic event that was well marshalled and well organised. Just don't expect to see too many Goshawks since you'll be too busy breathing and grinding up the climbs. Thanks to Robert Storey for the email correspondence and Andrew Miller for the photos.

Matt Lewis

Thanks to Gateway Cycles  
Accelerade energy gels and drink  
Exposure lights  
Mt Zoom

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