

Mountain man wins world title gold

BY KYE WHITE

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AFTER 23 1/2 hours riding through incredibly tough terrain on a mountain bike with only one gear, no-one would deny Brett Bellchambers is a champion.

Now he has a world championship gold medal to prove it.

Formerly of Turners Beach, Bellchambers is now the 24-hour mountain biking solo single speed world champion, after the titles were held at Mt Stromlo, near Canberra, earlier this week.

"It was definitely my hope to win it, I've been the Australian champion for the last two years," Bellchambers said yesterday.

"I had a pretty fault-free ride."

It was the first time the world championships have been held outside North America.

The 24-hour race, which began at 12pm on Saturday, is a gruelling challenge of determination and endurance, requiring riders to ride over 400km of arduous terrain, climbing over 9000 vertical metres in the process.

Remarkably, for the first 18 hours of the race, a gap of just 15 minutes separated first to third, leaving those riders with little time to have a break.

As a result pit stops were limited to no longer than a minute, giving the riders just enough time to swap their water bottles and grab a sandwich before continuing.

The top three remained close for the entire race and all three riders finished on the same lap.

One might expect the final hour would be the most difficult part of the race, but not for Bellchambers.

"No, I love the last hour because the sun has come up, it's morning, you're on your last lap and you know you are finishing soon," he said.

"The most difficult part for me was between 4pm and 8pm, it was really hot and I got into a little bit of a hole.

"I train in Canberra, where I live, either in the morning or early evening, so I am used to temperatures anywhere between minus two and three degrees."

Brett's father, Laurie, played a role in his son's victory as he filled the all-important position of Brett's support person for the race.

The performance of 37-year-old Bellchambers is even more remarkable given he finished seventh overall against all 411 riders from 15 countries who were competing with bikes with up to 30 gears, as opposed to Bellchambers' one.

"Yeah I was really happy with that, especially when you take into consideration they let the elites go 15 minutes early," Bellchambers said.



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