

Joe Murray played a successful waiting game to win the title.

David Epperson

Results, NORBA National Championships

September 30, 1984
Lake Eldora, Colorado

- | | | |
|---|---------|---------|
| 1. Joe Murray, Fisher, | 27 m in | 2:43:56 |
| 2. Ned Overend, Schwinn | | 2:47:32 |
| 3. John Loomis, Fisher | | 2:49:24 |
| 4. Kent Eriksen, Moot's | | 2:51:10 |
| 5. Don Cook, Ross | | 2:57:02 |
| 6. Aaron Cox, Ross | | 2:58:07 |
| 7. Andy Hampsten, Levi's/Raleigh | | 2:58:08 |
| 8. Dale Stetina, Ritchey USA | | 3:01:30 |
| 9. Ky Sharp, Mantis | | 3:04:33 |
| 10. Charlier Cunningham,
C'ham/SunTour (1st Veteran) | | 3:04:50 |
| 11. Jeff Norman
(1st Expert) | | 3:06:33 |
| 12. Greg Dres, Moto-Cruiser
(1st one-speed) | | 3:06:53 |

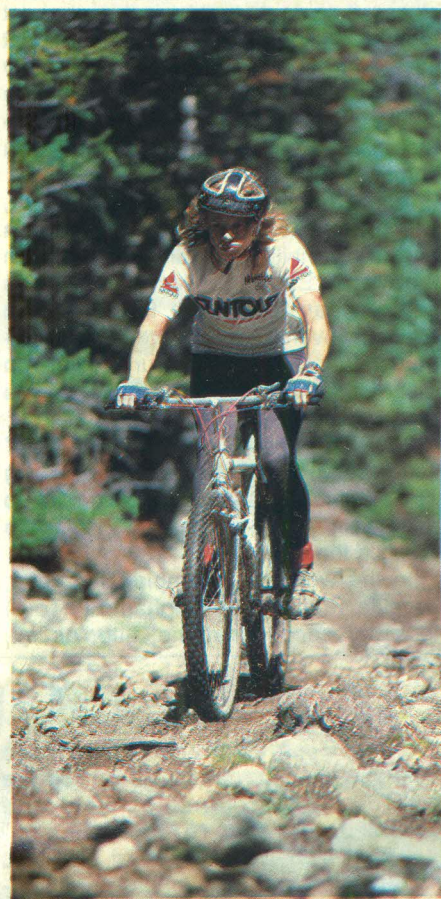
Women's Expert

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. Jacquie Phelan, SunTour/WTB, 18m. in | 2:25:18 |
| 2. Carmen Carrouché, Ross | 2:29:06 |
| 3. Carol Bauer, Paradise | 2:45:03 |

SKILL KEEPS MURRAY ON TOP

The National Off-Road Bicycle Association had something to prove in its second annual National Championships, since last year's muddy event in California had been wiped in controversy when it was shortened from five laps to three after the start. The 1984 championship race was moved from December to the end of September in order to avoid problems with the weather, but with two days to go even that didn't seem like enough as six inches of early snow fell on the course.

by Charles R. Kelly



Light snow remained on parts of the cross-country ski trails of the Lake Eldora ski area near Boulder, Colorado when the qualifying heat got underway on a bright Saturday in late September. Its distance was half the length of the off-road national championship final, which comprised six laps of 4.5 miles, with 480 feet of vertical change per lap — a total of 2,880 feet of climbing in the 27 miles. Because of the shorter distance compared to the Crested Butte stage race — which was held the week before and featured most of the same riders — some people had been calling the Crested Butte race the “real” national championships.

The Crested Butte race had been conducted on relatively smooth and high-speed dirt roads though, while at Lake Eldora the technical aspects of the narrow and rocky trails demanded complete concentration and a solid range of mountain bike skills. Still, most people looked for a battle between Crested Butte winner Ned Overend (Schwinn), second place rider Andy Hampsten (Levi's/Raleigh), and, Mr. Consistent, Joe Murray (Fisher).

Saturday's qualification heats had been scheduled to narrow the field to 100

riders if there had been more than that number of entries. As the day warmed up and riders circled the course they quickly melted what snow lay on the trail. Otherwise, the only aftereffects from the storm were a few boggy places and a little more water in the two stream crossings.

Since only 60 pros and experts showed up to contest the title, the three-lap “qualifier” event was run as a seeding race to determine starting position. An unexpected but positive aspect of the qualifier was that it familiarized riders with the course while helping melt the snow.

The championship race began just after noon on the Sunday, following a novice “citizen's” race and a bicycle “trials” event — its organizers hope to see trials on the NORBA championship schedule in 1985.

Factory teams on hand for the Pro/Am title included Ross, Fisher, Ritchey USA, Stumpjumper, Levi's/Raleigh, Moot's, Schwinn, SunTour and Mantis. The competitors lined up in order of their qualifying times — one of the more orderly bike race starts — with 12 rows of five each. The start across the wide parking lot gave riders a brief opportunity to reshuffle the order, then the mob hit the trail which was in most places one-bike wide with limited opportunities for pas-

sing except on the steep climbs.

On the first lap, Hampsten immediately broke off the front and put as much as two minutes between himself and Ross rider Don Cook. Right behind Cook, Murray led a hard-charging group which included Overend and trailed by another minute or more. Hampsten looked a sure winner, but it appeared that he made his move too early.

Murray's strategy all year has been to sit back during the beginning of a race and size up his opposition, reserving his strongest moves for the latter part of the races, and his opponents have mentioned that it is impossible to drop him. He closed the gap on the second lap, passing Cook, and took the lead on the third. Exhausted and stone-faced, Hampsten began drifting back to an eventual seventh place.

Murray showed why his 15 previous wins this season were not a fluke, keeping up steady pressure on the climbs and aggressively riding the rocky downhill while other riders were content to coast and rest. Behind him, Dale Stetina (Ritchey USA) moved up and had second place locked up if he could stay on his bike. But the tough course took its toll, and on the last lap he suffered a pair of flat tires that cost him nearly 15 minutes.

Murray's performance in the Pro/Am

Injuries slowed Steve Cook.

David Epperson

class left no doubt that he is the toughest mountain biker in the country, as he beat Crested Butte winner Overend by nearly 3 1/2 minutes. Murray's Fisher teammate John Loomis was third, another two minutes back. Kent Eriksen (Moot's) was a surprise fourth, followed by Don Cook.

In the only close finish of the day, Aaron Cox (Ross) outsprinted Hampsten on the downhill finish for sixth place. In the Men's Expert (unsponsored) class Jeff Norman took home the prize with eleventh overall, while Charlie Cunningham (Cunningham/SunTour) picked up the Men's Veteran prize along with his strong tenth place overall.

NORBA provides for an "Iron Man" (one-speed) class champion, and Greg Dres (Moto-Cruiser USA) picked it up with twelfth place overall out of 22 who finished the distance.

In the women's championship race, Jacquie Phelan (Cunningham/SunTour) took her second national title, as ex-



pected, after surviving one of the most spirited attacks she has seen all year. Ross rider Carmen Carrouché had Phelan in sight on the last of their four laps, but the defending champion put down the hammer when she needed to, taking nearly four minutes out of Carrouché on the last two-thirds of a lap. Carol Bauer (Paradise Bikes) was third.

With a successful championship race, NORBA has justified its existence as the national mountain bikers' body, and Murray's win shows that road cyclists will not be successful in this branch of the sport without developing the skills of a mountain rider. In the end, it was as much Murray's ability to maintain concentration and ride aggressively for hours over very rough terrain that won him his championship as it was his strength. Murray's average speed of ten miles per hour, and the fact that only one third of the field finished, is adequate testimony to the difficulty of the event. ■

CHAMPIONSHIP WARM-UP

The Crested Butte stage race served as a perfect tune-up for the NORBA championships held one week later. The three stages included a 37-mile dirt road and trail ride which included 3,800 ft of climbing (starting in Crested Butte at 8800 ft elevation), plus uphill and downhill time trials on the dirt access road at the Mount Crested Butte ski area, which gains nearly 2,000 ft in four miles.

Points for placings rather than elapsed times were used to rank the riders, on a sliding scale that awarded 500 for first place on the long stage and 250 for first place in each of the time trials. The effect of this system was to give slightly more weight to the downhill, since a good performance here could make up for slow times in the other stages.

In the first stage the NORBA emphasis on self-contained bike repairs had a definite effect on the outcome. The first five miles were on a rolling dirt road, and the leaders stayed together while it was still possible to sit on a wheel and conserve energy for the first steep climb over 11,250 ft Paradise Divide.

Once on the climb, the pack broke up, with Roger Marquis of Team Ritchey hitting the top first, followed by Ned Overend (Schwinn) and Raleigh rider Andy Hampsten. The next four miles were mostly downhill on a "single-track" footpath with plenty of switchbacks, including a two-mile section that drops 1,400 ft.

The lead didn't change here, but at one point Tom Ritchey (Team Ritchey) put a fine move on Aaron Cox. He passed him on the grass as Cox blocked the trail to protect his Ross teammate Don Cook who was just ahead.

Marquis looked to be heading for victory when he left the trail, since the remainder of the course was wide and relatively smooth dirt road over Schofield Pass, but his luck ran out abruptly. His rear tire blew out, and as he frantically set about changing tubes he was passed by Overend and Hampsten. Teammate Dale Stetina dropped off his pump (permitted under NORBA rules) but the pump didn't work. A frustrated Marquis vented his rage on his wheel as he walked back to the halfway checkpoint while everyone else headed up the road.

At the finish, the order was the same as at the halfway point, except that Marquis was out of the picture. Overend completed the 37 miles in 2:33:54, that was 1:42 better than Hampsten (2:35:36), with Stetina third, another two minutes back.

Although showers punctuated the finish of the first stage, next day the rain was continuous and heavy as the uphill and downhill events were set up. It forced several long delays, principally because the ambulance that was assigned to the top of the course became stuck in the deep mud and it took some time to get it out. The delay cost Gavin Chilcott of

Team Stumpjumper, who was fifth in the first stage, any chance at a placing, since he had to catch a plane to a race the next day in Chicago along with teammate Laurence Malone.

The deep mud also cost Joe Murray of Team Fisher when his bike clogged to the point where he couldn't ride, although his interest in continuing had already been reduced considerably by a poor finish in the first stage due to mechanical problems.

In the uphill, the road riders showed off their aerobic capabilities, with Overend first in 33:59, followed by Hampsten (34:57) and Stetina (35:43). Downhill time trials showcase entirely different skills than the more aerobic stages, and here Jim Deaton of Team Fisher showed why he has won every downhill event he has entered, stopping the clock 17 seconds ahead of his nearest rival Ky Sharp, riding for Mantis. Overend, with a time of 10:07, was seventh, which was just enough to keep him clear of Hampsten in the final classification.

— Charles R. Kelly

Crested Butte Stage Race

September 20-21, 1984

1. Ned Overend (Schwinn)	988 pts
2. Andy Hampsten (Levi's/Raleigh)	984 pts
3. Don Cook (Ross)	967 pts
4. Dale Stetina (Ritchey)	964 pts
5. Charlie Cunningham (SunTour)	955 pts