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BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING MOUNTAIN BIKING MAGAZINE

Mountain Biking UK

ISSUE 360
SEPTEMBER 2018

RIDE THE WORLD
CANADIAN ENDURO EPIC
COLOMBIAN COFFEE TRAILS
ITALIAN LOAM HUNTING

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Subscribe to **MBUK** and get a pair of **Madison Zenith Haze** trail shorts plus save 25 per cent on the shop price!



BOILING BRAKES, BURNING LUNGS & BLAZING TRAILS

OUR FEATURES EDITOR ED TAKES
ON CANADA'S EPIC SIX-DAY STAGE
RACE, THE TRANS BC ENDURO

WORDS: ED THOMSETT PHOTOS: DANE CROMIN, NOAH WETZEL,
PETER WOJNAR AND RILEY SEEBECK



The idea of multi-day enduro racing has always excited and intimidated me in equal measure. On the one hand, the allure of discovering world-class trails and the challenge of racing them draws me in. But then I remember how knackered I feel after one hard day on the bike. How would I ever manage six? This year though, in a moment of courage, I decided, “F**k it!” and jumped in with both feet, securing myself a place in the Trans BC Enduro – a race that’s renowned for chucking competitors down some of British Columbia’s steepest and most technical trails. This is how I find myself, three months later, with definitely not enough training under my belt, sat aboard a tiny twin-propeller plane, droning loudly over the snow-capped Kootenay mountains. The town of Rossland is approaching and so is the start line. Ready or not, I’m here, and there’s the small matter of a couple of hundred kilometres and several thousand metres of climbing and descending separating me from the finish line.

DAY 1: RED MOUNTAIN

Big yellow school buses – the shuttle vehicle of choice for the week – deposit us at the start of the Seven Summits trail. Officially designated an ‘Epic’ by IMBA (the International Mountain Biking Association), this feel like an apt way to kick things off. Spirits are high as we start out. A crew from Colorado have speakers in their packs, which are blazing out reggae to propel us into our first climb – a casual 800m ascent to wake up the legs. I’m pushing the pedals cautiously, fully aware I’ve got well over the height of Everest ahead of me this week. But then a rider comes flying past, pumping out the watts and breathing hard. “She’ll be done by day four,” remarks the guy in front of me. “More like day two!” his mate laughs.

From lichen-hung pines, we emerge onto a craggy ridgeline, where the remnants of the winter’s snow still cling between the rocks. It’s here, in front of an endless backdrop of hazy blue mountains, that the racing starts. Right from the off, the technicality is apparent. Consecutive hairpins through alpine scree gradually widen, allowing us to build speed, before culminating in a headlong pinball down a dried-up riverbed. If I was feeling a little dull-headed at the top, I’m wide-eyed by the bottom.

Stage two changes tack and plunges us into dark, loamy freshness, before stage three mixes things up further, with a bermed and baked-hard flow trail that snakes between the trees at high speed. Any errors of judgement

result in grazed shoulders and skinned knuckles. From here, things just get steeper, as we’re deposited into ‘Dread Head’ – a brake-burning plummet of chute, catch-berm, chute. With no pre-practice allowed, this is a baptism of fire, and by the end of the final stage I can see what the Trans BC hype is about. If the next five days are a patch on this, then I’m in for a treat.

DAY 2: ROSSLAND

I awake at 2am to the sound of rain hammering on the tin roof above my window. By morning it’s still unrelenting and on the start line, at 9am, my head is bowed to shield my goggles. While it may not be good for vision, the rain has dampened the dirt to perfection and the low, arcing berms we’re greeted with on stage one are prime. Lean, slide, grip, pedal, repeat. This goes on for close to 10 minutes, by which point I’m seeing squint, not just due to my fogged and mud-splattered lenses, but my lungs, which feel like they’re trying to escape my chest. Just as I think my hands are about to drop off the bar, the finish line appears through the mist and I skid

across it, gasping. “I just had a bear run across right in front of me!” the guy behind me exclaims. Roots and rocks aren’t the only trail obstacles here in Canada.

All the racing is blind, but pinned up by the start of each stage is a card detailing what to expect. I quickly learn that these must be taken with several pinches of salt. “A flowy, well-built trail” the next one reads, declining to mention the tangled messes of steep roots and slimy ladder bridges that lurk over every crest. Whoever thought racing along wet skinnies would be fun is a sicko, but hey, it wouldn’t be Canada without a bit of North Shore, right? This trail is just the warm-up though, as the real test is yet to come on ‘Flume’, a double-black downhill that’s rumoured to be one of the toughest of the week.

A throng of racers line the first craggy rock section, and their good-natured heckling highlights one of the best things about Trans BC – the camaraderie between riders. There are guys and girls here from as far afield as New Zealand, Brazil, Iceland and Denmark, and, yes, the days are big and the riding is hard, but you’re all in

LEAN, SLIDE, GRIP, PEDAL, REPEAT. THIS GOES ON FOR 10 MINUTES, BY WHICH POINT I’M SEEING SQUINT, NOT JUST DUE TO MY MUD-SPLATTERED LENSES, BUT MY LUNGS, WHICH FEEL LIKE THEY’RE TRYING TO ESCAPE MY CHEST

ENDURING A TRANS ENDURO

Multi-day stage racing is loads of fun, but can easily break you if you’re not prepared. Here are some things I learnt that may help you have a good time at similar events

- Make sure your bike is fully dialled before you head out.
- Fit tyres with reinforced casings to fend off those rocks.
- Condition your body by practising riding long descents top to bottom.

- Do some arm-pump training.
- Do some training in general, lots of training!
- Come fully stocked with spares – tubes, gear cables, mech hanger, split links, etc.
- Get yourself at least two good short liners and butter ‘em up. Chammy cream is a saviour!
- Pace yourself on the climbs. You’ll be thankful for every gear you have. (And there’s no shame in pushing.)
- Bring a sunhat for the

- climbs, and in the words of Baz Luhrmann, “Trust me on the sunscreen”.
- Drink all the time. I was getting through six to seven litres a day. Electrolytes are your friend.
- Eat snacks on snacks. Keep eating, little and often.
- Keep an eye on your tyre pressures – they can increase by several psi in the heat.
- A second set of dry, non-sweated-out gloves is a treat for the

- race stages.
- You’re racing everything blind, so keep your head up and anticipate what’s coming.
- Conserve energy on long stages. Don’t tense up or ride erratically, or you’ll burn out a quarter of the way in.
- You will crash at some point during the week and so will everyone else, so don’t give up. Climb straight back on the horse.
- Stretch. Lots.



Ed taking on the dusty and root-infested Red Mountain on day one



With views this good, you might even forget you’re dying on the inside...



“Look over there – a bear!”



Day two, and the dust was swallowed up by dank rainforest



This photo was taken at a food station, which explains why our Ed’s looking so chipper!

it together and a kinship of sorts is formed when you're halfway up a 1,000m climb and feeling ready to keel over.

Going fast on this descent is all about committing to some bold rock and root lines, and the overnight deluge doesn't seem to have improved the grip. If the hairy chutes around every corner don't get you, then the sheer length of the trail will, as I find out. Two-thirds deep, my arms are pumped to hell and I'm hanging so badly that I misjudge a flat turn and – Bam! – I'm on the floor. A rock to the chest knocks the wind out of me. As I scrabble to untwist myself from the tangle of bike, I think to myself, for the second time today, "This is the toughest thing I've ever done on a bike."

DAY 3: CASTLEGAR

I don't think my forearms and triceps have ever been this sore. Add yesterday's crash, and I'm feeling slightly apprehensive about the 10-minute monster that's kicking off the day. Thirty minutes north of Rossland, on the shores of the Columbia River, yesterday's rain soaking seems like a distant memory. The deep dust does a good job of filling in the holes, but I quickly discover they're very much still there, for as soon as I lay off the brakes, the gradient takes hold and the crumpling of my T-Rex arms into an unseen compression has me grabbing for the anchors to avert disaster.

Some aren't so lucky, and midway down I pass the race leader, Cory Sullivan, down and out with a broken collarbone. Stage one's pummeling is followed by a much-needed short and sweet confidence booster filled with deep, interlinking talcum-powder turns, where you can just drop a foot, chuck it inside and enjoy the sound of your roost cloud blasting the bushes. My overconfident bar-dragging comes to an end soon after though.

Bears and cougars may be the most fearsome wildlife in the BC backcountry, but I'd like to add mosquitos and wasps to the list too. Having already walked over a wasps' nest and been stung today (my fault entirely), I'm railing a berm midway down stage three when I brush my hand through the grass and one of the little yellow-and-black-striped f**kers decides to avenge his brethren. He stings me on my brake finger and then hangs onto my glove and keeps stabbing me as I drop into the next high-speed straight. By the time I get to the bottom and pull off my glove, my finger has swollen up like a sausage. In retrospect, this may have played to my advantage, as my inability to pull hard on the front brake means I'm forced to just point, shoot and pray down the huge moto-rutted dust chute that leads back to the river and rounds out day three.

DAY 4: KOKANEE

Yesterday I was really questioning how my body would manage the remaining

BY THE TIME I PULL OFF MY GLOVE, MY FINGER HAS SWOLLEN UP LIKE A SAUSAGE. I'M FORCED TO JUST POINT, SHOOT AND PRAY DOWN THE HUGE MOTO-RUTTED DUST CHUTE THAT LEADS BACK TO THE RIVER

through though, and a barely-controlled white-knuckle ride ensues, with split-second line choices around every turn, down dusty, boulder-filled chutes. Several times I find myself banging down a route that's so rugged I'm sure I'm about to get sent flying over the bars. How I stay on my bike, I don't know.

DAY 5: KOOTENAY LAKE, EAST SHORE

'The day of the steeps' is how the fifth day's racing is explained to us, at our nightly briefing. A crack-of-dawn start sees the whole race convoy board a ferry across Kootenay Lake – riders in buses, bikes rammed into box vans, and an assortment of campers, trucks and dirt-baggers in pursuit. It turns out the organisers weren't lying, and the first two stages drop a cumulative 1,268m over 4.6km. That equates to an average gradient of 27 per cent! I've ridden some bum-on-back-tyre stuff in my time, but nothing as prolonged as this. What's even more humbling is that the trail we're riding, 'Jurgenmeister', was built by two 60-year-olds! And these gnar-loving old-timers are revelling in the spectacle of the whole field skidding down their handiwork on the very edge of control.

You could probably cook a roast dinner with the heat coming off my rotors and all I'm thinking is, "If you crash, stay the hell away from those discs!" It's not just the brakes that are boiling today though. Temperatures are the highest they've been all week and shade is minimal, making the uphill fireroad grinds seem never-ending, as sweat drips in our eyes and the sun beats down



Yeti racer Nate Hills – foot out, flat out through the chunder



From up here to down there, as fast as you can go!



Taking the early ferry to the start of day five

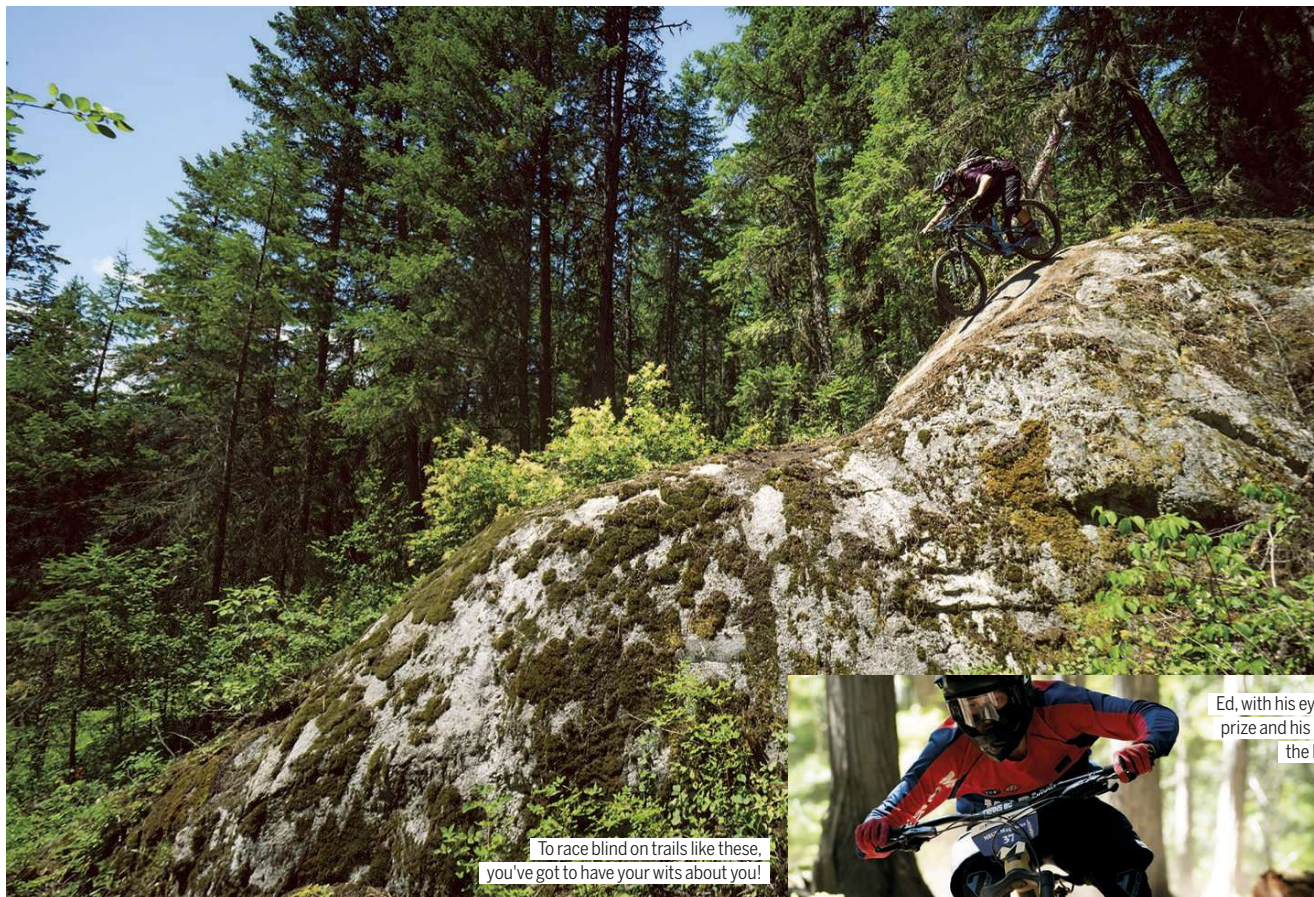


Did we mention it's rocky?



TRANS BC 2018 IN NUMBERS

6 consecutive days
224km ridden
9,392m climbed
13,367m descended
27 stages raced
0 practice runs
2hrs 34mins and 51secs of racing (for overall winner Max Leyen, a little longer for our Ed!)



To race blind on trails like these, you've got to have your wits about you!

on our backs. This is the morale tester, but we all know inside that the suffering will make those ice-cold beers at the finish line taste all the sweeter.

DAY 6: NELSON

There's a collective excitement as the final day dawns. The finish is within reach and our battered bikes and bodies only have to survive five more stages. Not that we're wishing the time away, when the trails are of this calibre. The city of Nelson is a melting pot, filled with all sorts of hippies and leftfield types, and the lofty forested slopes that rise directly up from the streets are filled with trails. A proper classic kicks off the first stage – infamous trail builder Riley McIntosh's masterpiece, 'Powerslave'. Switchback turns, off-cambers, ladder bridges and loam – this trail has got it all. If my arms weren't in danger of falling out of their sockets, I'd wish it could go on forever.

By noon, I can almost taste the satisfaction of finishing, but just as I start mentally relaxing, the Trans BC reminds me it ain't over yet. An eight-minute gnar-fest of roots and rocks is still to come, and if that weren't testing enough, then the midway fireroad sprint is sure to rid anyone's legs of any remaining energy. It's a descent of mixed emotions for me. I'm riding in a blur of tiredness, barely hanging onto the bar, but at the same time I'm cherishing it, knowing that the end of my BC riding experience is near.

Although for my battered body the finish line can't come soon enough, its eventual arrival signals the end of one of the toughest but best weeks I've ever had on a bike. Time will no doubt blur the memories of exhaustion, crashing and dehydration, and leave me with lasting fondness for an epic – yes, this event is fully deserving of that overused adjective – week of riding and racing in the Kootenays. I've sipped enough lukewarm electrolyte drinks to last a lifetime, so pass me that beer. Oh yeah, and where do I sign up for next year? 🍳



Ed, with his eyes on the prize and his hands on the bar (just)



Post-race cool-down done right!

COME AND HAVE A GO IF YOU THINK YOU'RE HARD ENOUGH!

• The 2019 Trans BC takes place from 1 to 6 July, with registration due to open in early October 2018. Organiser Megan Rose promises: "The trails will hold to the same level as always, with a mix of new locations thrown in with some past favourites!"

• There are two options for entry. The all-inclusive package includes airport transfers, condo accommodation and all meals, and costs around £1,460. Alternatively, the Dirtbag option covers race entry and on-course shuttles,

but food and lodgings are left up to you, for around £675.

• The Trans BC is based deep in the interior of British Columbia. Depending on location, the best option is to fly into either Vancouver or Calgary and take an internal connecting flight. For help planning

a trip to BC, check out www.hellobc.co.uk.

• Thanks to Megan Rose and all of the Trans BC team, from the trail builders and everyone who cheered us on, to those who provided us with food, fixed our bikes and generally kept us alive through the week!