

I was drawn to start at 10:30am, 2 minutes ahead of the reigning world champion, Veronika Kubinova of the Czech Republic. This only added more pressure to my already high expectations, having placed 5th at JWOC last year in this discipline. I decided to take it onboard as a challenge, determined to go as long as possible without being caught.

The day of the race was to be cold and wet - adding another element into the mix of factors that would decide the day's winners. Standing in the mud of the start chute, I tried to clear my head and focus on riding a navigationally clean and fast race.

I found the first two controls cleanly but I lost some time on the way to #3 with a marginally slower route choice. It was on the way to control #4 where I was faced with my first steep, muddy climb up through a gully - something that would feature prominently several more times, and contribute heavily to the outcome of my race.

On my way to control #7, I was caught by Kubinova, who was coming in from a different track. A steep, muddy and off-camber descent down to control #8 saw Kubinova thrown over the bars, and after a quick word to check she wasn't seriously injured I sped (somewhat out of control) down past her to number #8 and across the road to #9. This small lead that I had would not last long as a small error from both of us on our respective route choices ensured we met again at control #10.

I got away again en route to control #11, powering up the road climb and into the forest (see photo!) My gap extended further again up another muddy climb, where I realised that my fitness and technical ability would be the key to any chance of success in such physically demanding terrain.

Veronika caught and overtook me once again moving from #11 to #12, utilising her exceptional navigational ability to consistently pick the correct tracks in the spider-webbing network of trails.

This pattern would continue for rest of the race - I would pull ahead up the steep climbs and down the technical, slippery descents, only to be caught when the navigation became tricky and I was forced to slow down to avoid mistakes.

Unfortunately I couldn't do enough to make back the 2-minute gap - there were not enough long climbs for me to make up for slower navigation in the confusing tracks. We eventually reach the finish together, and although I knew my chances of gold were dashed, it was a matter of waiting for the remaining riders to see if I could hold onto the silver.

In the end, I was happy with how my race unfolded - the style of terrain suited me but the intricate navigation would eventually see me lose 1':59" to Veronika.

Lucy.

