



STOLTZ, WHITMORE REIGN IN KEYSTONE

"I think this course doesn't suit me because I'm bigger," said the six-foot-plus 2001 XTERRA world champion

Conrad Stoltz after finishing the 2002 Nissan XTERRA Central Championships in Keystone, Colorado. That said, he was surprised as anyone that he won the race.

A sold-out field of 700-plus athletes ascended to over 11,000 feet for this classic event. By the time it was over, they'd endure tepid-for-this-altitude, 64-degree water; 2,440-feet of climbing and descending; running along the edge of a cliff and through a river.

"A lot of guys don't realize that at altitude, you can't go as hard," said Stoltz. "Once you go anaerobic up here, you're in trouble for the rest of the day."

Proper pacing was the race's catchphrase, and the swim set the tone. Seth Wealing was the first man to hit dry land, in 13:20 — roughly a minute slower than the swim times for the one-kilometer dip in past years. Kerry Classen was, along with Stoltz, Canadian Mike Vine and Australian Jason Chalker, thirteen seconds back.

By the time they peaked out at 11,640 feet on the 26km mountain bike, Stoltz had eased his way into first while 47-year-old Ned Overend had moved into second. Overend had been two minutes behind Stoltz after the swim and passed forty-one riders. He now stalked Stoltz from forty seconds back.

The fast and furious downhill did little to change the standings. Stoltz and Overend maintained their 40-second separation with Overend scoring the day's fastest bike split (1:11:06). Vine entered T2 in third.

Stoltz powered through the 10km run in 40:30 to win in 2:06:40. Classen captured second in 2:09:11. LeBrun had the men's fastest run split (39:50) and moved up from sixth to third. Chalker took fourth and Overend hung on for the fifth spot. LeBrun now leads the XTERRA pro points series with 182 points to Classen's 172.

SLOW AND STEADY

The pacing mantra also carried over to the women's race. Kerstin Weule, three-time Keystone winner, eased her way into the lead by mile two of the ride. Weule stayed in



▶ Clockwise from top: High altitude forced a conservative swim at Keystone.

Stoltz makes his way through a stream crossing. Whitmore was perfect in just her fifth XTERRA.

front until halfway up the climb when she was joined by Canadian Melanie McQuaid. "I was being really, really conservative," said McQuaid, coming from sea level. "I figured this was going to be my throwaway race [in the pro points series], because I was an hour back last year." McQuaid slowly opened a 30-second gap over Weule but was joined by Jamie Whitmore a mile from the top.

"I knew it was a long climb to the top," said Whitmore, winner of 2002 XTERRA Saipan, "so I told myself to relax and set my sights on who was in front of me." By the summit, there was no one left in Whitmore's sights. McQuaid was fifteen seconds back, Weule forty-five. McQuaid tore down the mountain and beat Whitmore to T2 by fifteen seconds, but her lead would be short lived. Whitmore quickly surged past McQuaid on the run.

"I haven't done very many of these," said Whitmore, racing her fifth XTERRA. "I didn't know how my running was going so I just ran my butt off."

It turned out Whitmore, who turned in the women's fastest bike split (1:25:54), had nothing to fear. Her 47:58 run was the

women's second fastest (10th-place Jenny Tobin garnered the fastest in 46:20), and she won in 2:30:55. McQuaid finished next, almost four minutes back, with Weule third in 2:35:20. In the women's pro points standings, McQuaid now leads with 180 points with Weule next at 164.

The top amateur male was 24-year-old Josiah Middaugh from Vail, in 2:20:58. Middaugh was also the fastest amateur at 2002 XTERRA Richmond. The female gold-medal amateur was Sarah Fuld, 30, of Crested Butte, Colorado. "I can't believe it," said Fuld, who finished in 2:53:27. "I'm a full-time gardener. I just didn't feel ready for the race today. Thank God for the downhill on the bike." — BY SCOTT SCHUMAKER

NISSAN XTERRA CENTRAL CHAMPIONSHIPS, Keystone, Colorado, 1km S/26km MTB/10km R. July 28, 2002.

PRO WOMEN: 1. Jamie Whitmore (USA), 2:30:55; 2. Melanie McQuaid (Can), 2:34:34; 3. Kerstin Weule (USA), 2:35:20; 4. Kerry Barnholt (USA), 2:35:55; 5. Raeligh Tennant (Aus), 2:38:46.

PRO MEN: 1. Conrad Stoltz (SA), 2:06:40; 2. Kerry Classen (USA), 2:09:11; 3. Nicolas LeBrun (Fr), 2:09:45; 4. Jason Chalker (Aus), 2:10:18; 5. Ned Overend (USA), 2:10:39.