

Champs trick, if not tame, Wild Thing

South African and Californian win Xterra Central Championships at Keystone

By **SHAUNA FARNELL**
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JAMIE WHITMORE

Xterra Central Championship women's winner

KEYSTONE — If the idea of a high-elevation, 1-kilometer swim in 50-degree water, a 30K bike ride with 10 miles of relentless uphill and nine of jagged downhill and a 10K swim doesn't sound grueling enough, give it a try with whiplash.

Jamie Whitmore was the women's champion of the 2002 Nissan Xterra Central Championship at Keystone Sunday, and she did it all with a stumble during the run, a broken derailleur at the end of the bike course, and a sore neck from a bad spill she took preparing for the race.

"I cracked my (bike) helmet in three places pre-riding the course (Saturday)," Whitmore said after Sunday's competition. "I was afraid I'd wake up so stiff, I wouldn't be able to race today."

Whitmore did a header while coming down Wild Thing, the steep, boulder-laden downhill section of the Xterra course, and the portion of the race that many competitors, including pros, chose to run down Sunday rather than taking their chances with crashing.

"I was in a good spot to not be reckless," Whitmore said of her second visit to Wild Thing Sunday. "I already had my crash. You can only fall on your head so many times."

Also playing it safe on Wild Thing Sunday was Con-

rad Stoltz, who was the overall champion with a finish time of 2 hours, 6 minutes and 40 seconds. He completed the swim in 13:33, the bike course in 1:12:37, and the run in 40:30. Stoltz is a 28-year-old native of South Africa, and is the 2001 Xterra World Champion. He started doing triathlons at age 14, and competing on a pro level at 18. He took fourth in the local event last year, although he claims to dread Keystone more than any other venue in the Xterra Series.

"It's the most challenging because of the altitude," Stoltz said after accepting his gold medal Sunday. "It suits the smaller athlete a little better because of all the climbing."

Stoltz weighs in as one of the heavier pros at 185 pounds, but he took the biking portion by storm, even if he was running with his bike over the gnarlier sections of Wild Thing. He said he had a "perfect" ride with no mechanical difficulties and no loss of wind, which can happen easily on the 2,400-foot vertical grind to the top of Keystone Mountain.

"The course is an hour of climbing with no recovery," he said. "If you come up short, or make one mistake, you're going to be suffering the whole way. Technically, it's the most scary of any of the courses. Last year, I was first on the climb, but now I

feel pretty well-balanced for off-road biking. I'll feel pretty confident now at the other courses."

Whitmore, a 26-year-old resident of Sacramento, Calif., finished the triathlon in 2:30:55. She finished the swim in 17:03, the biking in 1:25:54 and the run in 47:58.

"The swim is always a challenge for me," she said. "Running comes naturally because I've been doing it a while and got a scholarship for it in college. I don't run as much as I used to though, especially in the altitude. And in triathlons, you get a lot of good runners. The biking is easiest for me, and there's a lot less people out there who spend a ton of their time biking. It's more ballsy and technical than swimming and running."

Whitmore said she has only been mountain biking for three years. Sunday was the first time she's ever competed at Keystone, and the race was her fourth Xterra. She blew out her bike seat in the last Xterra race in Richmond, Va., but was the champion in April's event in Saipan. Her athletic goal is to become the Xterra world champion.

The overall second-place finisher in Sunday's Xterra was Kerry Classen of Bend, Ore., with a time of 2:09:11. Nicolas LeBrun of France took third with a time of 2:09:45. Finishing behind



Summit Daily/Brad Odekirk

Kerry Classen, 29, of Bend, Ore., took second in Sunday's Xterra Central Championship at Keystone, finishing the triathlon about two-and-a-half minutes behind winner Conrad Stoltz.

Whitmore for the women was Canadian Melanie McQuaid, whose time was 2:34:34, and Kerstin Weule of

Evergreen, who finished in 2:35:20.

See more Xterra results on page A23.