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Press Release

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2018 UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz in Lenzerheide: Switzerland wins first gold on home soil

The 2018 UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes Benz got off to a great start for the host nation as Switzerland took gold in the Cross-Country Team Relay, followed by Germany in second and Denmark in third place. The Parade of Flags featuring the 57 participating nations officially kicked off the biggest mountain bike event of the year. Shortly after the opening ceremony, the first medal race, the Cross-Country Team Relay, got underway in the glorious late summer sun of the Swiss Alps. The thousands of fans lining the cross-country track were especially excited to cheer on their own team, as Switzerland stood to defend their 2017 UCI World Champion title.

At the sound of the start gun it was however the French team that took the lead on top of the first long climb, closely followed by the teams from the USA in second and Italy in third. The Cross-Country Team Relay is a unique format that features teams comprised of five athletes per nation. Each of the 22 teams starting in Lenzerheide included a rider from the categories Men Elite, Women Elite, Men's Under 23, Women's Under 23 and either a Junior Men or Junior Woman. As a result of this unique format it was French U23 rider Joshua Dubau, leading the Italian Elite UCI World Cup star Gerhard Kerschbaumer into the first descent.

At the end of the first lap it was Kerschbaumer, who was the first to hand over the reins to his fellow countryman Fillipo Fontana (Junior Men), closely followed by France and the USA. Team Switzerland, stacked with talent and heavily favored going into the race, was a surprisingly distant fifth at the start of the second lap. However, Swiss Junior Alexandre Balmer quickly turned up the heat and started to close the gap, eventually moving Switzerland into second place behind the now-leading French.

Australia stuns spectators with a strong charge

Heading into the third lap, Switzerland's Under 23 Star Sina Frei put down the power right away, quickly closing the gap and eventually overtaking the French team on the first climb. Meanwhile, seemingly out of nowhere Reece Tucknott (M U23) moved the Australian team into third position and rapidly started to close the gap to the leading teams until half-way through the third lap, Australia sensationally took the lead. Tucknott continued to power through the rough and demanding track at a blistering pace and by the end of the third lap, he handed over the reins to his teammate Holly Harris (U23) with a huge lead of 1:28 min over second-placed Switzerland.

However, the host nation still had their biggest Cross-Country stars, 2017 UCI World Champions Jolanda Neff and Nino Schurter, left to go. Neff started her lap red-hot, roared up the first climb and raced down the technical Heidi's Hell section with her usual extremely fast pace. By the time she entered the second half of the lap, Neff had already made up over 20 seconds on Holly Harris. Meanwhile behind Australia and Switzerland, the German team had slowly but surely made its way through the field and moved up into third. Going into the final third of the lap, Ronja Eibl (GER, U23) showed amazing speed in both the climbs and descents. Closing in fast on Neff, Eibl stunned the crowd by overtaking the reigning UCI World Champion on the final straight of the lap.

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Germany and Switzerland move into the lead on final lap

Still 40 seconds behind team Australia, who had given the reins to Junior Zoe Cuthbert, Manuel Fumic and reigning UCI World Champion, UCI World Cup Overall winner and Olympic gold medalist, Nino Schurter, started the final lap for Germany and Switzerland. Two thirds into the first climb both Schurter and Fumic caught up and overtook the Australian Junior, and led by Schurter, headed into the first descent. The Swiss Cross-Country superstar then did, what he does best and using his extraordinary technique in the descents, started to distance himself from Fumic. Behind the leading duo, Simon Andreassen took charge for Denmark and quickly managed to distance the French and Italian teams behind him, moving into third.

During the second half of the final lap, Manuel Fumic gave Schurter a run for his money but as the first athlete appeared out of the woods, the cheers of the thousands of Swiss fans in the Cornèrcard Bike Arena were a telling sign. Powered on by the crowd, Team Switzerland took the first gold medal of the 2018 UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz. In a result only few would have predicted, Team Germany sensationally took silver thanks to an immense team effort. Denmark comfortably held on to their lead over Italy and France and took home bronze.

Nino Schurter (SUI):

“It’s a great way to start the UCI World Championships at home. It was a tough battle. The Team Relay is a special race for us and it is really cool to ride with your teammates. They already did a great job before I set off and I just had to battle with the German Manuel Fumic. This win takes some pressure off all of us now. It was already an amazing atmosphere with a lot of people. To have the UCI World Championships back home in Lenzerheide, which is an amazing place to ride mountain bikes, is just great for the sport in the whole of Switzerland. I am pretty sure it is going to be the best UCI World Championships we have ever had.”

Manuel Fumic (GER):

„We knew we had a strong team coming here with national champions in all categories. It was a goal of ours to make no mistakes and maybe land a spot in the Top 3. Achieving this is great for the atmosphere and the whole team. In the end it was a great surprise after changing our tactics and starting with our Junior rider. Leon did really well and I thought right then that we had a good chance. Our U23 rider, Ronja Eibl, had an unbelievable ride, she was faster than Jolanda Neff. It was amazing to see and right then I knew we would be fighting for the win. Nino was a difficult task for me. When I reached the Feed Zone, I heard I was 12 seconds back and knew it would be a stretch. We are really happy with second place and the silver medal.”

Malene Degn (DEN):

„Winning bronze is huge. It was our goal to get a medal and we were curious to see how close we could get to the Swiss. After the first round we were only about 30 seconds behind the lead. Our Junior Alexander did a really good job and Annika is a power house, which put us in a good position. When it was my turn I was able to keep fairly close to Jolanda, but the U23 German girl, Ronja Eibl, was insanely fast. She caught me on a climb and I felt really slow. She even put pressure on Jolanda and was able to move into second place. Our last rider Simon Andreassen did an awesome job to hold on. We are really proud of our race today.“

Numerous side events and parties round off the show

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The first of five days full of mountain bike action at the UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes Benz saw worthy winners and there are still plenty more to follow. Thursday sees the XCO Junior Women and Men fighting for the UCI Rainbow Jersey, followed by the U23 on Friday. Apart from all the race action, spectators can look forward to numerous side events, parties and the 7,500m² / 80,729ft² big Expo-Area, where many exhibitors as well as all Downhill and Cross-Country teams will present themselves. Highlights are the Steinböckli Balance Bike World Championships, the Movie Night with «Free Riding Iran – The Gehrig Twins in the Land of the Mullahs» and «North of Nightfall», the #fullgasMTB Whip Off Contest, the «Flyer Uproc Dual Slalom» and several live concerts.

For more information on all side events: lenzerheide2018.ch/en/time-schedule-side-events

For more information on all races: lenzerheide2018.ch/en/race-programme

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+++Media Information+++

Information on accreditation and accommodation: lenzerheide2018.ch/en/contact-and-media

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