

ISDE Poland 2004

The Six Days Diaries

Report 7 – Day 3 – Fatalities cloud the Six Days

Day 3 brought tragedy to the ISDE centre of Kielce. Halfway through the day, German Trophy rider Swen Enderlein (No 161) was spat off his bike and collided with a tree, suffering fatal injuries. British rider Juan Knight was one of the first on the scene, but (along with two other riders), they were unable to obtain a pulse from the German. A dark mood descended across the whole event and the German Federation withdrew both national teams immediately.

As if this disaster were not enough, an outrider was also killed in a collision with a car on one of the town's main roads. The impact was so severe, that the machine was literally buried in the car and the two elderly Polish passengers were also killed. To have one fatality during an ISDE is tragic and rare, but to have four is truly exceptional. On the back of last years' fatality of British rider Matt Bowden in Brazil, many here fear for the future of the sport.

Almost all the riders and outriders don't want to talk about the accidents and carnage they have witnessed. We all like to think we are superhuman and these things will never happen to us, but today we have seen they do. As a rider you cannot consciously think of the dangers when riding Enduro's, otherwise you'd never compete or take risks, which is why most of us love the sport in the first place.

Weather conditions changed for Day 3, with steady rain starting at about 8am and staying on most of the day. The temperature stayed reasonably mild, so most riders left parc ferme wearing light or sleeveless jackets.

The big worry most riders had was that the road conditions would be very slick, a fact borne out by a spate of minor slips and a triple tragedy.

The dust would be much less of a problem today, most just changing filters at the halfway stage. The tests however were a different story. As the MX and Enduro tests are all on grassy type fields, the rain brings a total transformation in grip level. The first few riders round slip and slide posting slow times, whilst the later numbers are much faster as they are able to ride the worn dry line from corner to corner. The Juniors Si Wakely and Daryl Bolter are two very fast young men, and they continue to impress with exceptional times. Paul Eddy (No 7) is at the wrong end of the running order, but is still able to post 3rd E1 for the day. Wayne Braybrook and Ed Jones have a steady day, as does Juan Knight after his earlier trauma. Chris slips back off the pace a little today, again feeling a little uncomfortable on the tests. He is capable of much faster times and knows it, so he is very disappointed again.

Later in the evening, he learns of a 60 second penalty for clocking his bike in late after discovering an alarming problem. In the run into the final check, technical control and parc ferme he revs the bike to clear it out. Disaster strikes when a long bang and wail signify a major problem and the loss of all compression. In the confusion surrounding this, his minute slips over and his penalty is dished out, leaving him 72nd for the day.

Ideas about his mystery problem fly around, with two general thoughts. The bike has either destroyed a plug by blowing it apart, or it has sucked a ring out the exhaust. Neither is good news. Chris, Euan and I formulate a plan for Thursday morning to tear the head off the bike and take a look see.

Fortunately, Chris has plenty of spares with him, including a new piston, head and barrel, so it should be a relatively straight forward swap out. That said, the added pressure of a 10 minute time limit and the fact this has happened when he is riding for his national team will combine to put a substantial demand on his mental strength.

I have mentioned before that the top 5 of 6 scores count on any one day, so it looks likely that Chris will lose time tomorrow. It should however have a minimal impact on the teams overall position providing no other teamster suffers a major problem that day. It will however affect his medal position, and realistically may cost him his chance of a Gold medal. Today, the GB Trophy team remain in 5th, with the Juniors in 7th. The club team competition is hotting up, this time Wales "A" leading Army "A" by 1 second!!

Outriding was much more of a chore today, as the wind and rain combined to make the road sections pretty cold and uncomfortable. At the return to the parc ferme I change T-shirt, race shirt and jacket for a fresh dry pair and immediately start to feel warmer! The smile was soon wiped from my face when I passed the scene of the road accident and realised how quickly life can be dreadfully taken.

Day 4 will be a re-run of Day 3, so again map reading skills and wet weather road riding skills will be useful assets for outriders.

As a mark of respect for the people killed, most riders have chosen to wear black armbands on their kit tomorrow. Our thoughts are still with the families and friends of the riders killed earlier today.