



PILING UP THE POINTS: Caroline van den Bulk has her sights set on a second straight world championship as she leaves one of the checkpoints during the Radmarathon European Championships, held in Switzerland on July 3 to 4.

Eye on the prize

July 15, 2009 - by Brent Cooper

Racer builds big lead in World Cup points standings

Caroline van den Bulk is no stranger to steep climbs.

In her cycling career, the Huntsville athlete has had to maneuver her bike up some very hilly routes, with her eyes on the top as she slowly made her ascent.

This same scenario could be used to describe her climb into the sport's history books.

Van den Bulk is leading in the points race for the 2009 Ultra Marathon Cycling Association (UMCA) World Cup championship in both the women's open division and the organization's Ultraracing Cup. She increased her lead with an impressive showing at the 2009 720 km Radmarathon European Championships in Switzerland on July 3 to 4.

This was her second time at the European endurance championships, having competed at the event in 2006. She shaved five hours off the 2006 time this year, coming in second in the women's open division, and picked up very important points for the two cup standings.

"I have a pretty good chance at winning both," she said. "In the Ultracycling cup standings I have 106.83 points, and I am 20 points ahead of the nearest competitor. I am about 50 points ahead of the nearest one in the World Cup standings."

The racing season ends in October and the cup winners are presented with their awards in December, she said.

She won the 2008 World Cup after accruing 79.06 points and 5.4 difficulty points in three races recognized by the UMCA last year. She is the first Canadian to ever capture the title, having earned her point totals in races in Texas, Brazil and during the 2008 Race Across America (RAAM).

There are three divisions of ultracycling races: the European Cup, the Americas Cup and the World Cup. The World Cup is a series of premier races drawn from the European and Americas Cup races.

A rider earns performance points based on the difficulty points of an event's times and the rider's average speed. The difficulty points are based on the length of and amount of climbing in an event.

Van den Bulk is also on the edge of winning her first-ever Ultraracing Cup, which goes to the racer who accumulates the most points for races competed in the Americas, European and world circuits.

In the European championship, van den Bulk said she had to deal with very warm weather during her endurance race.

"It was around 29 degrees Celsius during the day and 14 at night along with some thunderstorms in the early evening. I was riding with a rain jacket for a couple hours and because of the warm temperature my wet shorts and shoes were drying, so I did not had to spend time to change clothing," she said.

Van den Bulk said the course was very well marked with reflective signs and it made for a very scenic ride.

"During the night I was always riding in the headlights of the support vehicle. The car needed to be close to me and that required a focussed driver. When the road was not straight, it was a challenge for me to go fast and still have a view of the course."

She said she was very tired at the last checkpoint, but her trainer Andrew Urban did a great job and kept her going with an average speed of 30 km/hr to the finish line.

"Between my last race in Slovenia (in May) and this race, there was not so much time to prepare. Andrew focussed on improving my average speed for the race. We had only five weeks to do this and it worked out very well," she said.