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Press Release

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UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz in Lenzerheide: Young Austrian dominates, Switzerland takes second gold

Following the exciting and action packed first day of racing that saw Switzerland defending its Team Relay UCI World Championship title on home soil, it was time for the Women and Men Juniors to battle it out for the UCI Rainbow Jersey. After a beautiful, sunny morning the weather was to change come race time, but luckily didn't affect the races.

The big favorite takes charge right out of the gate

The Women Juniors started the second day of racing in Lenzerheide as threatening clouds moved in, but despite a few rain drops, the rain held off and the course stayed dry. Right out of the gate the defending UCI World Champion, Austrian Laura Stigger, proved why she entered the race as the big favorite by opening a gap on the first climb. Making quick work of the technical and demanding track at the foot of the picturesque 'Parpaner Rothorn', Stigger finished the first lap with a sizeable gap on Tereza Saskova (CZE) in second and Harriet Harnden (GBR) in third.

Despite her early lead, 18 year-old Laura Stigger was far from taking it easy. By the end of the third lap, the Austrian UCI Junior World Cup sensation was already ahead by a massive margin of 1:28 minutes. Harnden meanwhile started to close the gap to second-placed Saskova. Entering the fifth and final lap Saskova and Harnden were head-to-head and fighting hard for second place. Half way through the lap, the Czech rider managed to put the power down, distancing herself from Harnden. Crossing the finish line waving the Austrian flag, Laura Stigger won her second UCI Junior World Championships with a time of 1:09:46, 3:03 minutes ahead of Tereza Saskova, who took silver. Harnden won the first medal for Great Britain at the 2018 UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz by taking bronze. The Top 5 were rounded out by France's Isaure Medde and Sofie Heby Pedersen from Denmark.

Laura Stigger (AUT):

„It was absolutely fantastic to race here today. A lot of people came to cheer me on and the atmosphere was just incredible. I want to thank everyone who was here. I wanted to push really hard right from the beginning and I planned to come first in both uphill and downhill sections. I think it worked out quite well.“

Tereza Saskova (CZE):

„It was a great race. I wasn't expecting to win the silver medal today. You know, Laura is on another level, but behind her there are a lot of girls like me battling for the podium spots and today I had a perfect day!“

Harriet Harnden (GBR):

“It was a big surprise, I was hoping to do my best and that is what I did. I wanted to get a good start and getting into the technical section ahead of the pack was important. From then on I just tried to hold my position for the rest of the race. I couldn't have expected more.“

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A bad start for the two favorites

A downpour just after the Women Juniors' race threatened to change the conditions for the Men Juniors' race but luckily the rain quickly subsided before it could affect the course too much. The two big favorites, defending UCI World Champion Cameron Wright (AUS) and European Champion Alexandre Balmer (SUI), got off to a bad start as both unintentionally spent time next to their bike. Frenchman Mathis Azzaro was the first to make it to the top of the climb right after the start, followed by Leon Kaiser (GER) and Kevin Vermaerke (USA). Wright entered the first technical descent in eighth, 15 seconds behind Azzaro with Balmer a full 40 seconds behind in 20th.

Azzaro set a quick pace early and started the second lap 25 seconds ahead of Kaiser and the now-third Loris Rouiller (SUI). Behind the Top 3, Balmer quickly raced through the field and moved up to fourth albeit still 49 seconds behind the lead by the end of the second lap. Kaiser meanwhile managed to pull a gap to Rouiller and was sitting comfortably in second place. Half-way through the fourth lap, Azzaro had a small crash, losing 10 seconds of his lead over Kaiser in the process.

It all comes down to the wire

The Swiss duo of Rouiller and Balmer turned up the heat to start the fifth lap and quickly started to close the gap to Kaiser who himself got closer and closer to the leading Frenchman Azzaro. A flat tire just before the Feedzone saw Rouiller falling back but his Swiss team mate Balmer continued his charge. Starting the sixth and final lap Kaiser and Balmer caught up to Azzaro and all three headed into the brutal climb to the top of the course at the same time.

As the riders emerged out of the woods for the second half of the lap, Balmer took the lead accompanied by the roar of his home crowd in Lenzerheide, followed by Kaiser right on his heel. Azzaro however had to pay the price for the quick pace he set in the first laps and had no choice but to let the duo go. Balmer and Kaiser finished the second half of the lap locked in an intense sprint, but cheered on by the Swiss crowd, it was Balmer, who after already playing his part in Switzerland's Team Relay victory the day before, crossed the line first to take the second gold medal for Switzerland in three races. Kaiser backed up his strong showing in the Team Relay by taking a second silver medal for Germany, while Azzaro rewarded himself for a strong race with bronze. Rouiller held on to fourth place despite his misfortune, Moritz Schwab (GER) completed the Top 5 by overtaking defending UCI World Champion Cameron Wright on the last lap.

Alexandre Balmer:

"I had an unbelievably bad start. In the first downhill section, I all of a sudden found myself next to my bike and lost at least 30 seconds. I thought my race was over right then. But I told myself, that I had to give everything I had for my country – especially to give back for all the support I have received all year. I knew there was still a long way to go in the race. On the last lap, Leon really pushed hard on the climb but I was able to fight my way back. It really was a crazy race, I could not have imagined this yesterday. I am so happy, that I was able to compete like that at this altitude. My Junior season could not have been better."

Leon Kaiser (GER):

"This morning when I found out that we had to race six laps, I thought to myself: 'This is going to be a long race'. I had a great start but didn't want to overpace at the beginning, so I let Mathis go and rode at my own speed. When I heard that Mathis had trouble towards the end of the race, it motivated me to give it another push and I was able to catch him. I had Alexandre on the climb in the last lap but he was too strong in the technical sections. In the end he had a bit more left in his tank. I am super happy with the silver medal, the second one after the team relay. I really have no words."

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Mathis Azzaro (FRA):

“I had a really good start, took the lead right away and was comfortably ahead. In lap 4 I had a crash, broke my helmet, and Leon and Alexandre caught up. I really struggled on the last lap, I gave it everything I had but they were simply stronger than me today.”

Numerous side events and parties round off the show

The second of five days full of mountain bike action at the UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz saw intense battles for the UCI Rainbow Jersey but the racing in Lenzerheide is far from over. Friday sees the U23 XCO Men and Women battling for the title, followed by the Elite XCO classes on Saturday and the Downhill finals on Sunday. 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 #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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