

Katja Rietdorf (Born to Bike & London & Home Counties) wins National 12 Hour – Both RTTC and VTTA) with the 4th furthest distance for a woman.

Geoff Perry (L&HC) supported Katja to her outstanding win along with driver and chef sandwich maker Burti.

Katja really didn't stop all day and rode much further into the unknown than we had imagined, as this was her first 12 hour, and on the outset she just wanted to go over 240 miles to get on 'The List', all else was a bonus ...

We thought that she was likely to be in the ball park for the gongs, with Jasmine Muller's withdrawal, but she was up against seasoned campaigners of Lynne Biddulph (nee Taylor) [BtB & Midlands VTTA] and Crystal Spearman (28yo), but having finished three 12hrs myself and DNF'd on two, there is always the unknown that might catch a novice or even a regular out.

It became evident early on, as we could monitor Crystal, who started 10 minutes behind Katja, that she was going OK, but Crystal was catching her on the leg to/from Hereford. Some of this could be due to Katja being held up on the traffic lights both ways, which she completely forgot about until Tuesday, but we don't know how Crystal fared here. With Lynne off 46 mins prior to Katja there was no way of knowing how things were fairing there, until they were a lap into the mid-morning 26m circuit. I had previously advised her that Steve Abraham (regular 240 mile man) would be a good marker, off 3 mins earlier, but around 22 miles she went past him and thought at that point 'I hope this doesn't mean I am going too hard and will blow up later in the race ...' At the first feed stop, 46.661 miles into the ride, Crystal had closed the 10 min gap to @4mins (I was only counting whole mins) and someone else timed it to the lowest gap of 3.5 mins at some stage. She was off again before all the carefully planned food could be handed over, and it became clear that she doesn't want to stand still a second longer than absolutely necessary ...

Just after the traffic lights on the return leg from Hereford (@75m) the gap with Crystal was 5/6 mins and I reckoned that she was 5 mins up on Lynne (for the same distance) but wary of what I had calculated. As we had to wait to keep an eye on the other Women Vets which followed after Katja, we were not at where she was expecting us for her 2nd feed at 92 miles. Not seeing her support car passing, some cursing went on in her head, the amount of energy drink to be consumed was rationed to make it last to the next agreed meeting point at 99 miles. Seeing the support car pass on the A40 was a big relief for her, and luckily for the support team, Katja never took the time to complain about the lacking feed stop and resulting confusion. And she never realised that she almost caught us out on that stop ... To our surprise she had not been caught by Crystal but had moved the gap back to 6mins.

Katja came through 99m (end of first mid-morning lap) in 4:36:59 and Crystal 4:42:47. Obviously Lynne had been and gone off on her second lap.

We remained there monitoring things, and the rain of course - even got the spare bike with alloy rims ready in case the need for a bike change.

So laps of 26m followed.

125m was the first time that we saw Lynne which was the first time I could be sure that both Katja & Crystal were up on Lynne, and likely to be leading the Women's VTTA event competition. The on-the road gap between Katja and Lynne (#10) was down from 46 mins (Katja was #56) to 30mins as Katja put in a stunning first morning lap, and had appeared to recover her gap on Crystal to 10/11 mins but I wasn't time that precisely at this stage.

Katja was 5h 43m after 125m. I worked out the relative average speeds and had Lynne on 20.718mph (@ 125m) and Katja on 21.48mph (@99m), so not strictly comparable.

151 miles had Katja there in exactly 7hrs. Lynne had passed through 21 mins earlier so both Katja & Crystal were well up. Crystal clawed back some time on Katja who seemed to have a slow 2nd lap (Were the wheels about to fall off) as the gap with Crystal was 6 mins (on arrival), but 7 mins on departure with a gilet. It was steady rain by now so some were putting on the wet weather gear - we had none for Katja, but brollies for her supporters. The rain was actually welcomed by her, as it stopped the wind, and she disliked the cross-wind on the A40 section coming from the back-road to the Ragnar turn, and even more so hated the headwind going from Ragnar to Abergavenny for the first time. In fact, until she realised that she did go into a headwind, she thought that this was it, and she had overdone it, consistently riding on 8 W more power than advised until that stage. So the tailwind going back to Ragnar was making her smile and feel confident again.

168m had Lynne to Katja gap down to 13mins, and Crystal had clawed back time to 10/11 mins (again was timing that accurately).

Katja through 168m in 8h 9m

We then moved on from the end of the mid-morning circuit to check progress at end of circuit (194m), which had Crystal through there in a minute less (for the same distance) so on the road gap 9 mins. Things were getting tense along with the continual rain, as in my mind I thought Katja was 'up'. Luckily Katja didn't know any of this drama, and her only thought was to keep the power constant, 2 W above the target, and hope not to drop the average speed on the slower finishing circuit. She told herself that it's her ride, and she can only affect her performance and do as well as possible – knowing how close it was might have made her push harder and blow up (or not, we will never know ...).

Following a request from a competitor to collect his self supporting possessions Burti & I got separated so Burti had to drive off on her own to feed Katja for her first time on the finishing circuit. Subsequent analysis showed that this stop was longer because there were only one 'pit' crew. At that point the pit stops were working superbly, sign language upon arrival showed what was needed, and that was less and less as it became evident early on that the idea of solid food was good in theory, and the support car was in fact a mini supermarket (maybe we should have sold food to other supporters and acted as a Snack Van?), but in the end all her stomach could take were protein shakes for the first 4 hours, and gels throughout the race. Left leg for the supply, right leg as a temporary waste bin ...

The support team reunited after a walk between time keepers and we parked up just after TK1 on the finishing circuit and timed them through, and fed Katja every lap except the last one. These stops were never long enough to relay any information about the race going on between her and Crystal – she clearly had her competitive hat on, and no longer saw it as a ‘cycling holiday in Wales’ – a term she had used in the run-up to the race.

Katja at 10h05:34 elapsed with a @11.5min gap to Crystal so was ahead by 1.5 mins - not a lot about 1/2 mile at the speeds there were travelling (around 21.5 mph), so the outcome was still uncertain.

We then started to take the gap timing seriously with the stop watch, so next loop round Katja was (elapsed 10h50m) with a total gap 13m 44.49 sec to Crystal (so 3:45 gap is just over a mile) was looking good if she could hold it.

Further Excel spreadsheet work on the finishing circuit estimating arrival times to all the TimeKeeper posts put her on an unimaginable 257, but though she might slow to 255 ish. I estimated that she would finish between TK7 and TK8.

Last time round Katja was non-stopping in an elapsed time of 11h 35:32 and on the road gap to Crystal was 4m 4 sec so a win was on the cards if no mishaps, and we urged Katja on with this likely outcome to ensure that she would not let up. Of course there has to be one mishap in a race, and we weren’t aware of this until after the finish. Her Di2 charger broke, so the bike wasn’t fully charged, and about 7 miles from the finish the chain refused to change back on the large front chainring. Seeing her preference for riding at low cadence, this meant that tired legs now had to spin faster and still didn’t deliver what she knew she was still capable of. In fact, hearing my shout ‘Go for the win’ really did spur her on.

We should have returned up the quicker DC (as we needed to do the intermediate timing), but decided to follow along the slower SC (just in case), so we did miss Katja at her final TK and made her cycle on the follow one where we picked her up.

We took the liberty of assuming she was the winner with @257 and told Katja so, and she kind of believed it and started smiling as soon as the body allowed her to, but she really wanted to see it black on white before accepting the truth.

The final results put her on 258.0356m winner of the Women’s RTTC National Championship, women’s VTTA National Championship, course record holder, National Age group record, and 4th furthest distance for a woman in her first ever 12 h TT. She was also 3rd in the overall VTTA Championship (which includes both genders), so she has certainly collected a lot of gongs.

Crystal Spearman was a close 2nd only about 2 miles less, and Lynne was third in the RTTC event and 2nd in the VTTA event. The two other Women VTTA members had pulled out during the event – one missing the turn after the tunnel at Monmouth and ending up well on the way to Ross on Wye. The other packed as riding past her front door on the Hereford leg was just too tempting.