

World Masters Mountain Bike Orienteering Championships 2019

Germany 3rd - 6th October



Dodgy knees seem to be a reason a lot of orienteers take up mountain bike orienteering, including me. We don't want to give up running but still want to be competitive and MTBO ticks all the boxes except that it is a bit more hair raising going down some of the trails and reading the map whilst going at high speed. I had seen the World Masters Championships event listed around Christmas 2018 and decided to give myself a good chance at a reasonable placing.

My year's preparation included a lot of cycling (300k in the month before the event) and 3 trips away to other MTBO Masters events in Seville - Spain, Plzen - Czech Republic and Epinal - France. I had mixed results in all of them including taking 45 mins to find the start flag in Spain, bike failures in Plzen and brain failures in Epinal.

So off to Germany. Hilary, myself and the bike in the car and a 1000km drive to the event. We stopped at a UNESCO site for a tree top wander on a boardwalk 50m above the ground. The wind was strong and were amazed at how much trees move at the very top and we run and cycle underneath them in any weather!

Arriving at the model event on a wet cold day I picked up my start times and race number and all competitors were presented with a very nice bottle of beer. I'm not sure if my British humour got through to our German friends when I asked if we had to drink it just before starting our race!

I went out for a practice and got Hilary to drive to the bottom of the hill to save me cycling up the 250m climb back to the car park. By the time I finished I was wet, cold and had only fallen off 3 times on a very steep rocky mountain bike track with sharp tree roots which was a route to a control. What was even more upsetting was to see the youngsters coming down parts of the track fast where I had decided to walk down it. But my walking did help for the next few days as I did a lot of pushing, pulling and walking with my bike!

Day 1. Middle distance, 15.5 km, 270m climb. Thalheim Burgerwald

This race map was at 1:10000 but included a cycle trail park at 1:2500 which confused many people including myself, as we were all trying to complete it quickly and we needed to simplify it. I did come out of the park in 3rd place out of the 20 in my M65 class so hadn't done too badly.



The route to control 1 included having to jump over a deep stream bank carrying your bike as best as you could or a dip up to your knees pushing your bike. I was well in contention for a good placing until I chose the long route on the flat around the lake for control 16-17. I fell off on a tree root at a 45% angle to my front wheel and came crashing over the bars and ended up 3 mins longer on a 6 minute leg. I was a bit hesitant for the next few legs on the wet grotty paths and ended up 6th place but I had survived and chosen routes that worked well and needed to remind myself to orienteer and then cycle.



The longest queue of the day was for the bike wash and even with 6 hoses washing bikes, with little pressure the queue was over 1 hour long but you had to clean and oil your bike and get all the rubbish off otherwise it would not perform tomorrow. Luckily for me Hilary's Christmas present last year was a portable bike pressure washer which can also double as a shower and saved me and a few of the other British competitors a long, cold queue.

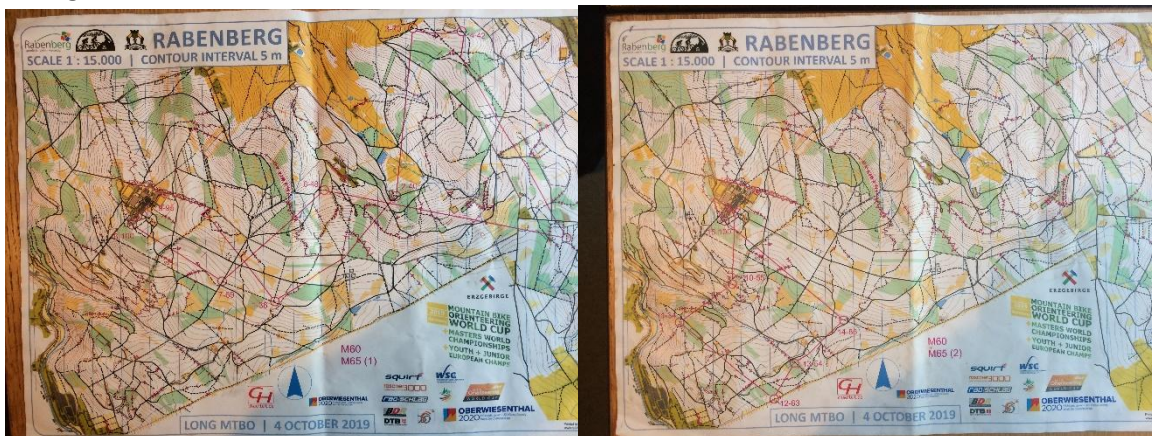
Day 2. Long Distance, 26.8k, 580m climb. Rabenberg

An early start today on a cold but dry day but the tracks were still very wet and muddy. After the practice a couple of days ago my strategy had been to go the long way round on good tracks if it is an option. On a bike you can go over twice the distance in the same time if the route is good so you do need to look very wide at times. Pity I forgot my strategy!



When I started MTBO I thought it was about cycling not pushing or climbing but today I did lots of pushing. I made a bad route choice error between 2 and 3 and mistook the contours as going down rather than the up. When I got to the bottom of the green strip just south west of control 3 I found 85m of climb in a distance of 350m in front of me! Just like a mountain you could see all the way up but push I did and was shattered by the time I got to the top. I found out later I was the 4th fastest split but still not a good route even though every route had to climb at least the same. After that it did seem a long way with not many controls but a good orienteering experience with different route choices. My other error was going down and up from 10 to 11 instead of the long route round but the mountain bike track down was great fun, wiggly and windy, great banked curves on a good surface with no rock. I enjoyed it so much until the hill on the other side. Note to self--- don't enjoy it until you've finished -- it's a race!

6th again in M65 from 20 enthusiasts from all across the world.



Double sided map

Day 3. Mass start, 17.8km, 450m climb. Fichtelberg

This day was like no other. Driving rain and wind. The temperature did not rise above 3°C, mist made visibility about 75m, completely against the norm as advised in the bulletins of October being the driest month of the year!

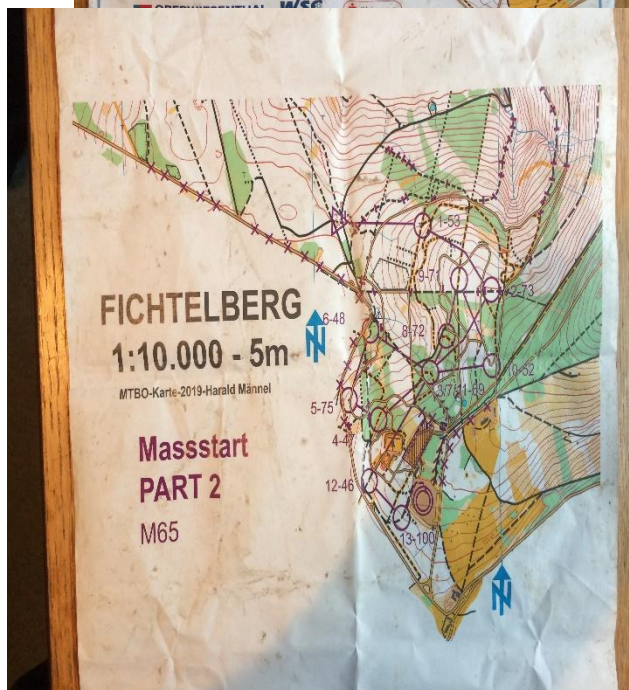
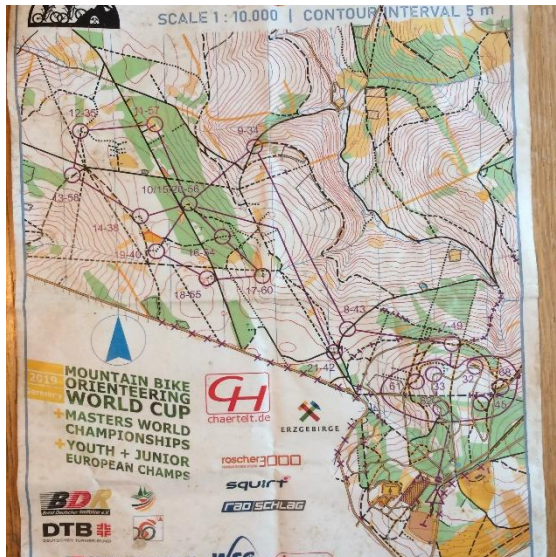
I don't think I have seen so many people smiling on the start line of an event. We were all trying to huddle close together and the smiles were, 'Are we really going out to race in this weather, you must be joking' but out we went and I think anybody who raced that day was a winner to get back safely. The first 6 controls were to be collected in any order, mainly on good fast tarmacked roads before heading off into the worst mud I've seen in a long time. Thick goey sludge that if you fell in you might never be seen again and we were expected to cycle through it. I again spent a long time pushing and pulling and once when I couldn't move forward or back pulling the bike upwards with a sucking sound from the mud as it came free. At least you didn't need to wash the mud from the bike or go through a puddle as the driving rain washed the bike while you were riding.





Before I started and when I finished 2 hours later

The course had a recommended winning time of 75-85 minutes but in our class the fastest time was 101 minutes due to the conditions. My fingers and toes were freezing and I think it is the fastest we have ever left any event. Luckily our accommodation was only 5 minutes away and I went in the shower with all my clothes on and stayed for the next 30 mins getting warm and washing as much mud off the inside off my kit as there was on the outside.



As for the result I was in bronze medal position 3 seconds in front at the final control. Looking at the other competitor I thought it was a very wet and bedraggled lady, who was going faster than me, and, as I couldn't keep up anyway I let them pass only to find out the following morning when the results came out it was someone in my class. They beat me to the finish line and I ended in that horrible position of 4th. Mind you if you told me I was going to be 4th when I started I would have been very happy. In the end I was upset as I let someone go faster than me on the run in which is where my competitive streak usually shows most and I refuse to be beaten. I must train harder especially in the rain and mud – for next year!

Day 4 Sprint. 4.9Km, 70m climb, 32 controls. Johannegeorgstadt map 1:4000

Fast and furious in dry but cold conditions.

That's the only way to describe it as there is little time to think with a control popping up every 45 seconds. One minute you are on the start line and the next you seem to have finished. What happened in between you can only analyse after the event. I knew I had a good race with no major mistakes, a few little ones as you have to read the map so fast while on the move and check SIAC numbers as you go past flags as there were many other controls out on the courses. I was the last

starter on my course so I knew my position would be the final placing, got my splits and before I looked at them the commentator announced I was 4th, 11 seconds from a bronze, 49 seconds from gold. I knew I made a small mistake 2 controls from the end which took me 53 seconds costing me 35 seconds on the fastest time split. ***** !!!!!!!!!!!!!



Will I be back - you bet. I'm already planning next year's events ending with the world championships in Finland in September. What have I learnt? I need more kit to keep fingers and toes warm and don't fall off the bike. It hurts and costs you time!

