

Must be a record !

Map pick up to start flag = 45 mins and 11 km cycled.

I had entered the World Masters Mountain Bike Orienteering event near Seville in Spain, 3 events held over the weekend of 30/31 March 2019. Not having a bike box for my bike I managed to hire a mountain bike near the event and was on the start line for my first event amongst very nice looking (expensive) bikes and kit all around me. The pre-start was at a sports stadium with a 25min call up time to cycle to the starting area, and we were duly set off 40 mins late due to technical issues on the course after having done our warm up routines. The route through the town had police waving us across the main junctions and stopping the traffic, it all felt very professional. What they had not told us that the start was 7km so I ambled along reasonably fast, but passed by all the youngsters, paused to look at the finish, thinking the start would be very close. How wrong I was. I left the finish and came over a small hill and could see riders who had passed me going up a hill and no sign of the start. Looking at my watch I had about 10 mins to my start and not wanting to be late for my first event thought I ought to push it a bit over the sandy/ gravel tracks.

Middle event 23km

Eventually I arrived at the start, 4km away from the finish, with 30 seconds to spare before my start time. I had time to get off the bike, have a quick drink and stretch. Well I was nicely warmed up and ready for the start, the clock pinged, I picked up the map, secured it to the map board on the bike and took a quick look at the route - 600 m down the track, turn right to the junction, turn left, another 600 m, turn left. Easy! What I hadn't allowed for and didn't see was the slight red dotted line to the start flag. It was 2.4 km down the track and I made the map fit my route! (How often do we do that as orienteers?) When I entered a farmer's area and he unlocked the gate to let me out and another time when I was on the main track another British rider shouted keep going I didn't realise I was wrong. As I was at a junction with a lot of greenhouses down the other one I thought he meant keep going around the greenhouses, so I did lovely tomatoes but no flags! So I decided to go back to the start and do it properly. When I got back they were packing the start up but no worries I now knew where I was, I relooked at my route, went slower and estimated the correct distance, still I was wrong. Finally I worked it out, calmed down and studied the map and got to the start flag 45 mins and 11km of racing (plus the 7 pre start) under my belt already. Still only another 23km to go to finish the race. After that the course was fine except for the very sandy tracks which I had to walk on and the racing errors I made trying to read the map while bumping along.

I think the finish team was pleased to see me as now they could pack up. I had only been 2 hours 36mins, last place, only 1 hour after Peter Muller, of ski Sunday fame, 2 Olympic silvers in downhill skiing, possibly he was used to going fast! I drowned 2 bottles of water, ate some fruit and checked my phone and saw I had missed 3 calls from Hilary. Something must be wrong. When I phoned back it turned out that because I had been a long time no finish time was recorded and it appeared that I was still racing five hours later! "Are you OK"? Yes- just a little confused, but I was here to learn MTBO and I had had a steep learning curve. So on to the sprint. We were supposed to be in quarantine soon and the sprint town was 30 km away.

I packed the bike up, zipped along the very open straight flat roads to Fuentes de Andalucia, a very old cobbled street town of 7500 people which they closed to traffic in the afternoon so we could cycle through it. Waved through by the Guardia on duty, I parked at the event centre/finish, reassembled the bike and pedalled off to the sprint holding area. Still I should be OK for this afternoon as I had only done **45km** so far today!.



WMS&YGS | MIDDLE
F-50, M-15, M-17, M-60
R4 | 23,0 km | 230

MARCHENA WMS&YGS

SCALE:1/15.000 | CONTOUR INTERVAL: 5M

30TH MARCH
MIDDLE



MAPMAKER:
RESNAV
FEDO MAP NUMBER:
SE-2346-19
COURSE PLANNER:
JUAN FRANCISCO ABELLÁN

II TROFEO VIA VERDE DE LA CAMPINA MTBO

INTERNATIONAL ORIENTEERING EVENT - I PRUEBA DE LIGA ESPAÑOLA MTBO 2019

USE IF SPORTIDENT FAILS

R1 R2 R3

Sprint 7.6km approx 48m climb

Into the holding area and advised we had a 1-hour delay before our starts as we reckoned they were still finishing some bridges we had to cycle over at compulsory crossing points. It was time to relax and enjoy the sun until I got cramp in my calf 20 mins before I was due to go. At least we could see the starts 300m away and were released 4min before but the start was straight up a hill so I needed to be in the easiest gear to start with. 33 min later it was all over. Fast and furious, cobbles and dead-end alleys, contactless punching so even faster as you had controls over 2 steep bridges which you either attacked to get over in one go or pushed your bike over as other competitors cycled underneath. A lot of the locals were standing here possibly waiting for us to fall off! I came full tilt off the bridge, bounced down some steps into the playpark, up the hill, under the bridge, 2nd left 1st right, turn right, turn right, sharp left and down the hill. No time to think, catapulted up the step into the gymnasium, bounced out the other side, rounded the tennis courts into the local school yard and so on in a complete blur until you slid to a halt at the finish. Then hold your breath as you downloaded your result hoping you have passed all the correct controls as there were many in the town that weren't yours.

This must be the most fun you can have on a bike legally in a town

Still, a result I was very pleased to have 6th out of 14 but unfortunately 7 were DSQ, probably because you had to get very close to the units and check that your dibber flashed as you were going fast but they also had other controls close by but on different features. So you had to try to see the number as you were bumping along also avoiding some competitors who for some reason were stopping and dibbing the controls. Hilary was watching in the UK on YouTube live screening and said it looked positively dangerous but in fact it was just a very exciting course.

The organisers had also provided free massages in the event centre so as I made use of this service I reflected on why I was a little slow in the sprint. A couple of mistakes, legs tired, kept getting wrong gears on my hire bike, first event, getting used to the map. All things that I hopefully, can now improve on.



Long Event 32km

The long event was on most of the same area as the middle event except we were using a 1/20000 map today where as we had a 1/15000 yesterday. I had slept well last night possibly helped by the huge steak I had and so was ready for anything that could be thrown at me today. The pre-start was in the same place so I checked with the organisers if I could go to the start early as I had been late yesterday but they advised me the mistakes of yesterday had been sorted out and today would be much better. As they released us 20 mins before our start I decided to race a little faster and try to keep up with the youngsters but slowed on the sandy section. Still I was only 1 min late for the 3 min call up so moved forward where I asked straight away where the start flag was and luckily you could see it about 600m down the hill. Someone then wrote a start time on my control card and as we had been pre-informed that we were going to be having some butterfly loops today we would have map A or B. The gentleman next to me translated that I was on B course. Suddenly they said I should go as it was a chasing start after yesterday's times and I was starting at 10.16.40. I went over to the maps, collected M-60 B course R4, checked as I turned it over and put it in my map holder and off I went. First an easy downhill fast track to the start flag, past a farm, 2nd right at the crossroads, left at the end of the small track which held the control flag. None of the flags on the courses were on tricky control sites you just had to chose the right tracks and hope they weren't too sandy. 24 controls later I dashed for the finish and then relaxed. I was quite pleased with my ride, time to download. Out came the readout - DSQ with all the wrong controls! I tried to explain to the non-speaking English results team that I got all the right controls and something must be wrong on their system, went and got my map and checked it against the readout. All the right controls dibbed. I went back to download where I then managed to find an English speaker who advised me I had done the wrong course. I showed him my map M-60 course 4 B. It was the correct map.

He then explained that organisers had thought the courses were too long yesterday and had downgraded courses and I should have been doing the course for M-70 B which was only 19kms and it was written on my start number at the start, 30 seconds before I started. There were no notices at the start to say courses had changed and I was only told I was on B course so the controller let my time stand but it doesn't look very good as the winner of the 19km course completed in 74mins and 29secs and my time of 146mins and 31secs for 32km. Last again.

Maybe I need to learn Spanish.

So, having downgraded the long distance it had now become shorter than the middle distance race the day before on the same area. Not to worry as it was a learning experience for me and possibly the organisers.



Can you read the R5B when its pinned-on upside down?

But overall it was a great adventure helped by a great group of UK mountain bike orienteers who tour around many of these events and made me very welcome. Next event - 5 days in Plzen Czechoslovakia aiming for the World Masters championship in Germany early October.

Kevin Pickering