

# World Masters Mountain Bike Orienteering Championship 2023

By Kevin Pickering

This Year's event was held in Slovenia with 320 entries from 29 different countries and is for competitors over 35 in 5-year age classes, with the oldest competitor in M90 class.

My new class of M70 had 16 competitors from 11 countries with the furthest from Australia, the week started with a model event in a very wet and muddy forest as it had been constantly raining for a week, with the temperature 7-8 degrees. I did a small practice slow ride and at the end commented that it could be the last man standing who will win, as everyone struggled on the wet paths and all the wet roots that tried to unbalance you, and would be a lot worse when you were racing. But the next day with a **mass start** event the sun was shining and the temp had risen to 15. The event was based on a small aerodrome which Orienteering taking over for the day. The start and finish was along the runway so plenty of room for everyone. We were starting with M75, W60 and W65 all on the same course with different butterfly loops, so there were about 50 riders on the start line. You were allowed to put your map in the map holder with 15 secs to go before the start, I managed to get mine installed quickly and looked at the map on the runway and saw a very complicated map with lots of route choices, as we turned off the runway I was in the lead of the pack and stayed there until we entered the forest when 3 riders came past me. Knowing we were all going to the same first control it was the case of sticking together and briefly checking the route, and trying to work out direction for no 2, I recognised one of my main competitors going the same way so partially followed him, which turned out for the next few controls that we were both going the same way. The ground had dried up a little but there were some very big muddy puddles that you had no idea how deep they were until you entered them, so there was quite a lot of getting off and pushing through. No 12 control was up a steep hill and everyone was pushing up, I was in 4<sup>th</sup> position when I got to control 13 and thinking everything was going quite well and pushed hard to the next control where I stopped to work out route and realise, I gone to no 15 before 14, Stupid! What should have been a 2min leg to no 14, I took 9 mins and then concentration went and I made more minor errors including missing turn from control 19 to 20 and cycling down the steep muddy hill at no 12 which was a bit scary. Ended in 6<sup>th</sup> place, 6 mins off the medals but after dismantling my bike to get in my car noticed part of my frame was broken affecting the gears so I couldn't use them all, a quick trip to the local bike shop and they managed to do a temporary repair and said the gears would be 80-90 percent OK. Luckily, they were fine for the rest of the weekend. The course was marked as 13.2 km straight line route with 100 mts of climb, my route meant I cycled / pushed 16 Km with 150 mts climb in a time of 95 mins. One of the ladies on our course got possibly the biggest cheer of the day when she came in at the end of the prize giving in a time of just under 4 hours, but good on her as she completed the course.







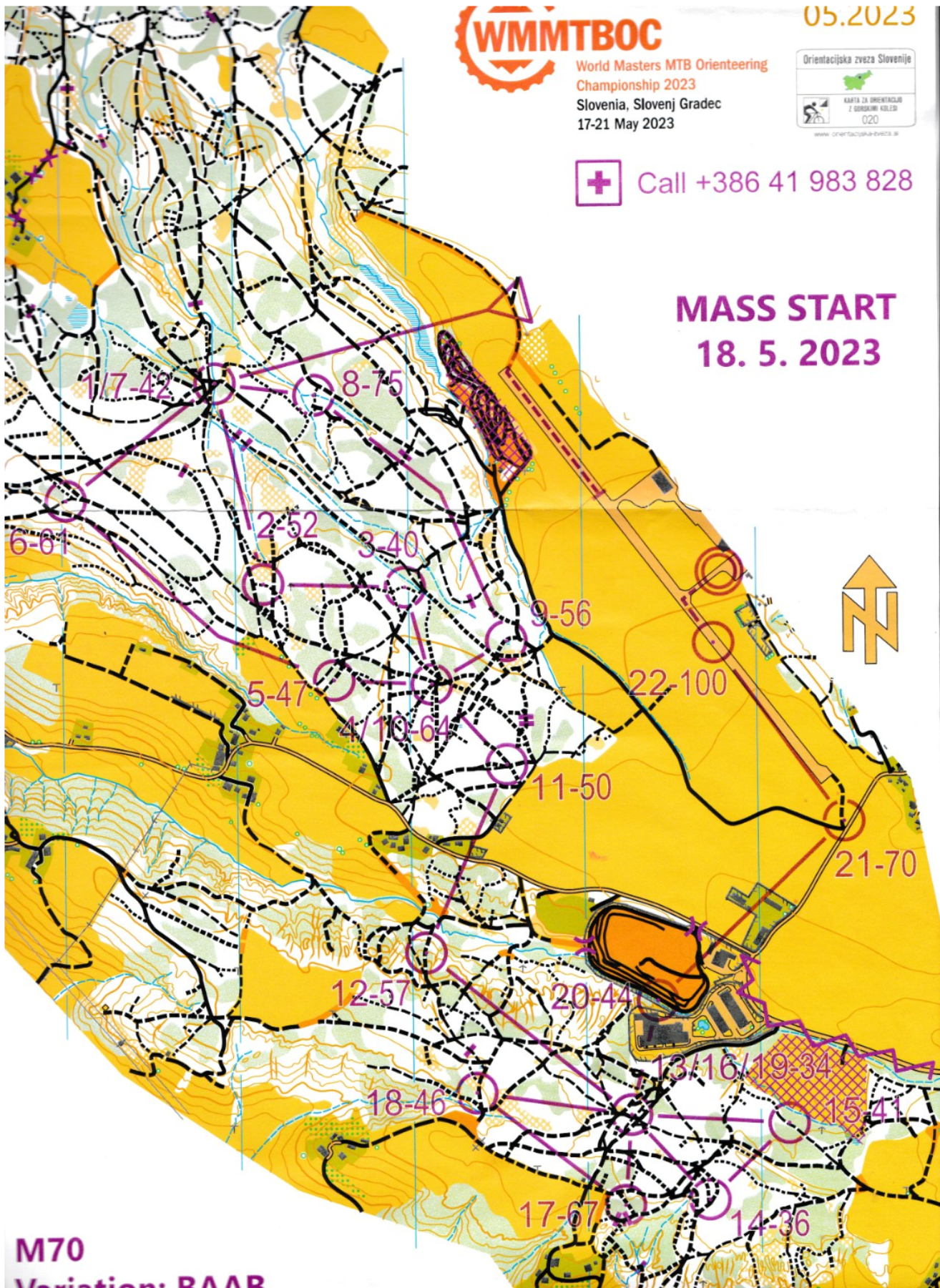
World Masters MTB Orienteering  
Championship 2023  
Slovenia, Slovenj Gradec  
17-21 May 2023

05.2023



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**MASS START**  
**18. 5. 2023**



**M70**

**Variation: BAAR**



The following day was the **middle-distance** course 11.5km 185mts climb more my thing as it was a straight-line course with starters every minute, although it was an early start as the competition was held 100kms away from the main area. we parked in the local athletics /football/ speedway stadium and could see the finish was half way around the dirt speedway track. 1<sup>st</sup> mistake forgot my buff which I find is good to cycle with as it soaks up the sweat and saves a stiff neck, but managed to borrow one from one of the 7 Brits at the event, who along with all the other competitors make MTBO such a friendly sport and worth going a long way for.

This start you are allowed the map 1 minute before you go, so I have found over the few years I have been competing to not look too far ahead so planned routes to 1 and 2 only, from 1 I decided to go up the minor path as it was more direct and bought me to no 2 going the right way but felt there was too much pushing as it was very narrow steep and rutted in places, but later found I had the fastest split and leading the field at no 2. No 4 I made a small mistake as I went past the control into the marsh but turned back to see it was mine, told myself to concentrate more, 5 to 6 long routes east then south on major paths but again felt I was slow on the east path as it was very slippery, especially when a youngster speed past me and disappeared around the corner, another talking to my self and the secret to getting things right, some jelly babies from my pocket. 6-7 a little bit scary as a steep rocky downhill as marked on the map with the !! marks. 7-8 worth coming back to the main path as it is more direct but a decent hill to climb which helped me as the partly the same route 10-11 and I thought I managed to cycle in once so I can do so again, although saw 2 people walking part of it which sometimes makes me think I should do the same. The ride up from the lake to 11 was hard as well and just thinking of getting off when the junction before 11 appeared and you could see the control so cycled all the way. Knowing I hadn't made any major errors talked again as tired after the hill climbs and 12/13 and 14 are controls easy to get wrong, concentrate and orienteer don't ride flat out and miss them. Worked out distance and stopped near double junction west of 12 and pushed up to control, great downhill picking up 13/14 then hit the road very fast downhill, wind and sun in your face this is fun, oh sugar where are we exactly, a couple of marshal's in yellow jackets at the sharp right turn, good we must be there and there's control 15 , careful on 16 as you have to go past it and come back on the road, blast through the town with marshal's at every point, hit the speedway track and go for it, further round the track then I thought but keep going to finish line where I do collapse in a heap for 5 mins to get breath and senses back.

Download, wait for that reassuring comment that all controls are good and I have a time of 62.54 in 3<sup>rd</sup> position. As I was late starter with only 3 people behind me and knowing one of them has beaten me before, I go for a quiet warm down and thinking if only! 10 mins later back to the live results and I am still 3<sup>rd</sup> and will finish there, on the podium with a World bronze medal

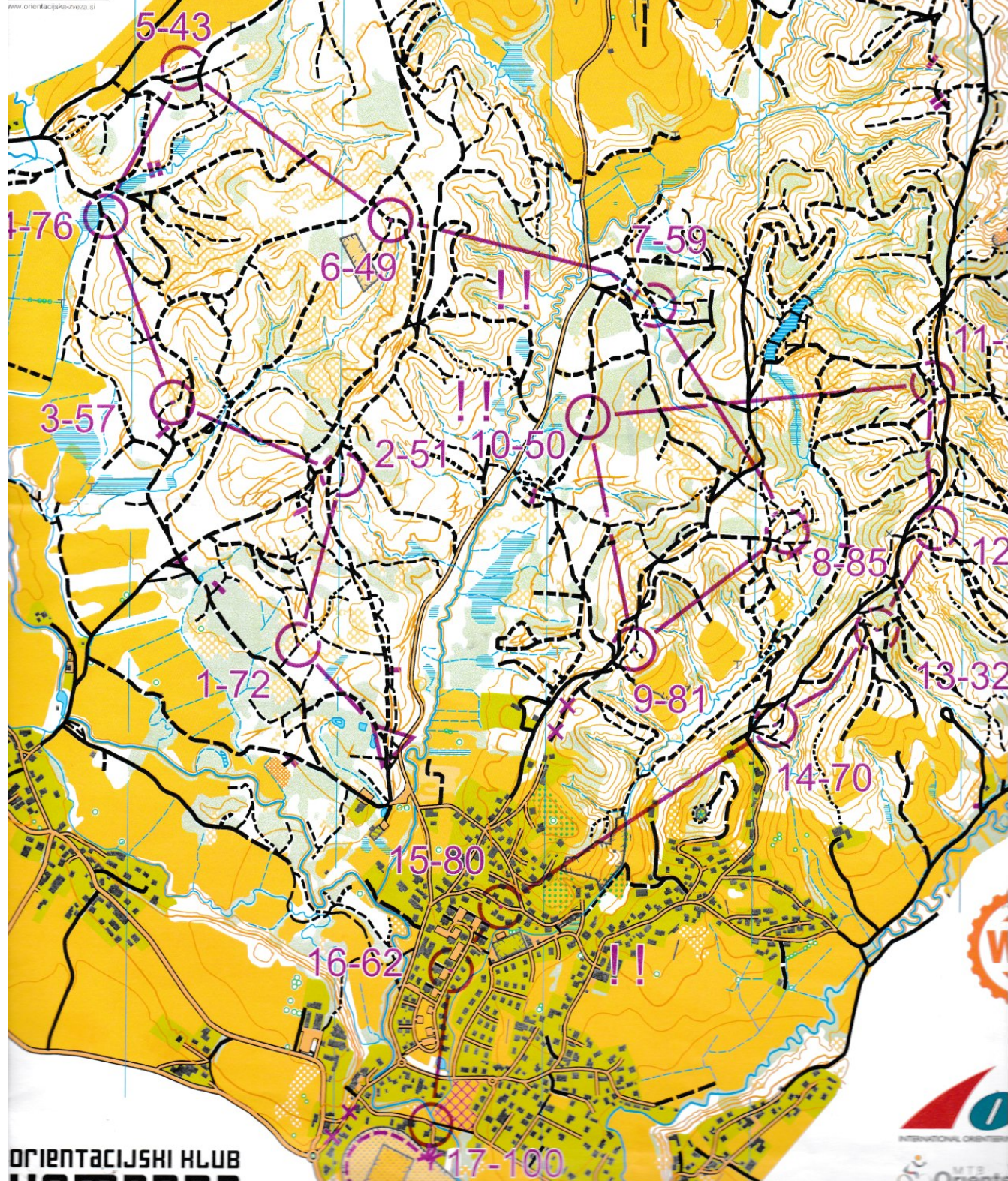




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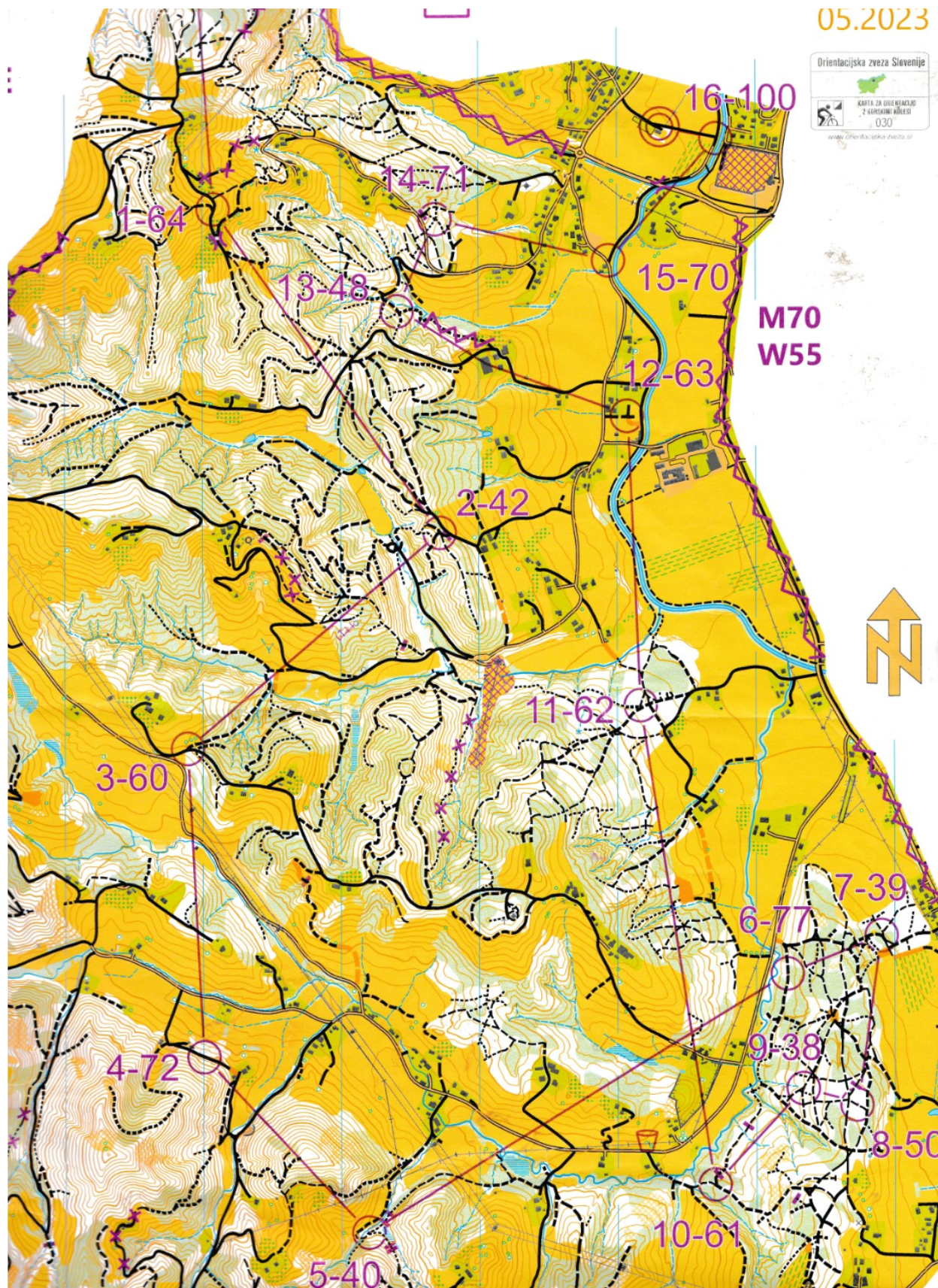
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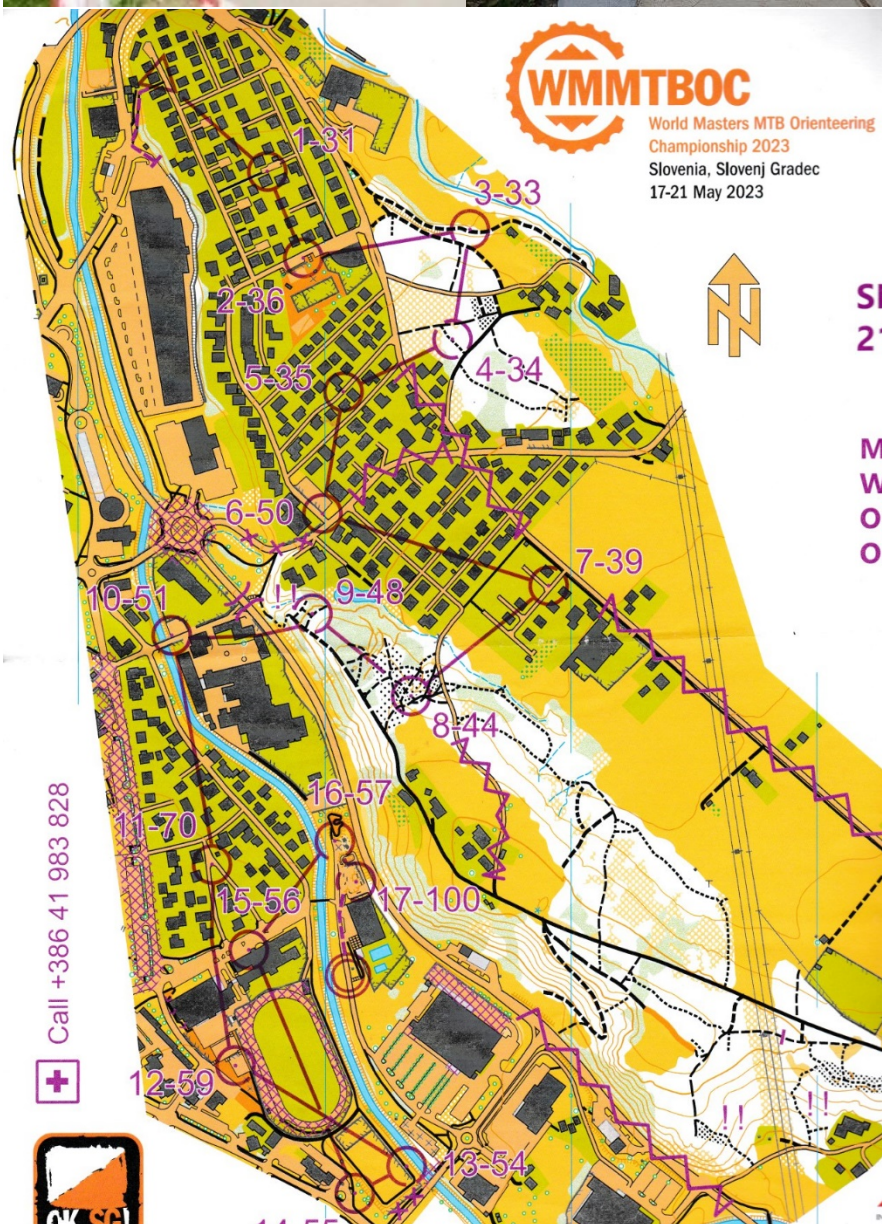
**Long distance** 17.2km 360 mts climb

Event centre to the start was 2.5 kms and 160 mts climb, but luckily managed to get a lift as one of the other M70s was already in the bus that was suppose to be for M75 and above. Maybe I should have cycled as made mistakes from the very start of the race and lots of controls thereafter, quite a bit of pushing up some of the very steep hills, with a real kicker control 12 to 13 taking you right back up the hill which you have got to come down again. 6<sup>th</sup> position today but 18 mins longer than the winner. Best bit today the sun was really bright, and temperatures had risen to low 20's I did hit a speed of 50km an hour going down one of the many hills.





**Sprint Day**, possibly more my race as I managed a bronze in last years world Masters Championships, could I improve today? It was advised as a mix of urban and forest so full use of all techniques. 4.8km 17 controls and 50mt climb with a scary underpass which all routes have, narrow bridge and playpark.



It was very useful for the M70 class starting late in the day as we could watch early finishers all doing the same route to the finish and see controls 16 and 17 and best route to finish, although in the heat of battle, plans got forgotten a little, but at least we didn't have to map read as we all knew where the controls were. Also, on the route to the start you could see controls 13 and 14 but didn't know if they were on our course, you could see a direct route taken the southside of the football pitch (13) and going up the steep bank, but you didn't know it was out of bounds until you got your map. Many competitors got disqualified taking



direct route as there was a marshal at 14 taking riders numbers to disqualify for going on OOB. The difference was only about 12 seconds riding time on the correct route on the leg. I got to the start in good time and practiced fast starts as we had been told start to the start flag was up a steep alley with no overtaking and I didn't want to be slowed by anyone, there was only one fellow starter an M60 on different course, who shouted at me to go faster up the alley as I got there first, I thought I was flat out full power. I had decided to approach control 1 from the east side as easier to see the road and it meant I was facing right way to ride fast past control 2. There were several drives tarmacked the same as the roads on the way to one which just put a little hesitation that had taken the correct route. Stopped at junction towards control 3 as again some riders had made a small path down earthbank, which was not allowed, I took correct route left and right down path. 4,5 and 6 really good and fast but slowed after 6 at t junction as I had not planned route, I should have slowed on way to 6 and studied map to work out route to 7. The corner on the way to 7 when you hit the path was a blind corner and dangerous as you came back the same way, careful but fast to 8, no 9 was a right turn down a steep hill, a bit put off by photographer at bottom of hill and I passed the turning with my brakes full on by a mtr or so and had to back up. Down the hill fast turn sharp left in to underpass, Oh Sugar, going to fast on first ramp but can't stop now, second ramp steeper, oh Double sugar! hang on tight, 3<sup>rd</sup> ramp even worse, apologise for the swear word, echoed in the underpass, luckily no one around to hear it. Easy ramp other side and easy control at side of river, 11 was straightforward, 12 through underpass between buildings, first set of steps to steep to cycle on orange colour which is allowed so jump off and carry bike, 2<sup>nd</sup> step less steep so could cycle up, its important to be in the correct gear for the terrain coming up, most of course was in faster gear. Speed hard to 13 as know where it is, but was the only control I didn't hear dibber beep or see flash as dibber in my right hand and control on the left and I am going too fast with corner coming up fast. The controls were set to record as long as you were closer than 1.5mtr, some competitors taped dibbers to their helmets by their ears so they could just hear control record visit. 14 direct route OOB although now a good few bikes have made a small path so always tempting to follow but I stuck to the black lines. Now full speed around west side of building and flat out past 15 over bridge sharp left and then have to do a 180 degree turn at 16 over bumps in playpark and give all you've got to finish. Fall off bike exhausted. I know my times good but how good? procced to download after recovering and get those dreaded words you've missed controls, which ones, most of them, but then they notice dibber is registered to someone else who raced on different course earlier, I had advised them I was using a different dibber but they had not recorded it on the computer, and it would take a few minutes to sort out. Started pacing, would they disqualify me for using different dibber as I had left mine at accommodation after the long event or could they correct it as I had advised them. Back to download after 10 mins. OK you are on the results, 2nd out of 13, 3 more to finish but they must have taken longer as they were I have been finished for about 15 mins. Was I Happy a World Silver medal.

It made the winter months of training worthwhile, many miles cycled hard either on the indoor trainer or through cold and wet weather and included 3000 sit ups to strengthen the inner core in a month. I ended 11 seconds off the gold medal place, my hesitation to no7 had cost me 17 seconds from the fastest split, but I did all I could and it ended a great week, with Slovenia being a lovely country and a great atmosphere among all the competitors. The slogan for the event was – we are all winners, and it certainly felt that way.

A you tube video of the M70 winner in the sprint can be found at -- <https://youtu.be/d3SE9wmXDDw>

