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Spiiders at the ABSA Cape Epic

Robe continues to 'Work with Winners' on the ABSA Cape Epic mountain biking race in South Africa's Western Cape region ... which starts on Sunday and finishes on 26th March.

Robe, together with its South African distributor DWR is a proud sponsor of two riders ... Pierre Griffioen, owner of rental company Pure Event Gear, and team mate Fritz Pienaar, who will ride their hearts out on this extreme event.

Pierre and Fritz have prepared physically and psychologically for this adventure where Robe stepped in as a sponsor – and don't they look fantastic in their Spiider riding gear!

"The Absa Cape Epic is an amazing opportunity," said Fritz who has participated in the race before. "The vibe is unlike any other event I've ever done."

There's plenty of nervous anticipation before you start. "It's like a race horse standing at the start when the gates open," says Pierre, who has also completed before. "You just want to get going because you have all this extra energy. You've done your training and by Sunday you just want to ride."

Not many races see amateurs and world class champions standing on the same line and competing in the same race. The Prologue on Sunday, which starts at Meerendal Wine Estate and includes parts of neighbouring Hoogekraal, will see each team riding on their own to determine the starting times for the following day.

"On that day, you just ride within yourself and you ride together – you are not allowed to be more than two minutes apart from your team mate - or you could end up with a penalty," explains Pierre.

That said, team mates stick together as even a minute apart will prevent them from knowing if the other has a puncture or any difficulty on the route "You can also help each other because one team mate can ride in front and deflect the wind, making it easier for the person riding behind," said Fritz. "Riders take turns in the front particularly for the flatter sections of the race and on windy days."

The main focus is to ride within your own ability. It means not trying to keep up with the pack as this could lead to a personal injury. "It's advisable to hold back," said Pierre. "You also ride according to your heart rate because if this is at an upper level it, produces lactic acid. A lot of this race is in your head!"

Planning and thinking ahead is key. With the competition running over eight days, it's pointless to finish a stage 'broken'.

Eating and drinking are vital elements, and once a race stage has been finished, you need to recover quickly.

“After a stage the first priority is to fill up with nutrition” says Fritz. You’ve probably ridden over lunch time and burnt about 10 000 calories at this time! Then you need to get your bike sorted!

At the Epic there is a team looking after everyone and a bike shop available, but before that your bike has to go to the wash bay. “You will also most likely need a shower and a massage and all you can think about is this race. There’s no time to sit around and worry about work!” confirms Fritz.

While the average time for Pierre and Fritz to complete a stage is between five to six hours, some riders take between ten and twelve hours.

They spend the same amount of time on their bikes as what most people do in the Comrades Marathon (the world’s oldest and largest ultramarathon of approximately 89 km long and run annually in KwaZulu Natal between Durban and Pietermaritzburg) ... and do it again tomorrow and again the day after! It is tough on the body and there’s plenty of aching muscles and saddle sores!

It’s not only the legs to consider, says Fritz. “We take high sugary carbohydrate drinks to try get energy into the body, but then your stomach can get upset, so you have to manage that”.

For Fritz, the little niggles are sometimes the biggest thing to handle. “If you get a sore Hercules knee for example, you have to ensure it’s immediately attended to. He recalls his first ever Epic when his knee seized up and, trying not to disappoint his team mate, he kept riding and pushed through. Three days later he couldn’t bend the knee and was forced to abandon the race.

Things can change quickly in the Epic. It’s a matter of looking after yourself, looking after your bike, and on day three, four and five, when you’re getting tired and things start getting ‘technical’ ... it’s essential to keep focus.

Twenty seven per cent of Epic starters didn’t finish in 2016, and in 2015 it was around 30% ... and even if everything goes right, you can fall and break something, the bike can go wrong or you can get sick or injured. “To get a good Epic finish, everything has to be dialled in and you have to look after yourself really well.”

Pierre initially received an invitation from ABSA to ride the Epic but it was his responsibility to pay for his own entry. “Just getting an entry is a feat on its own,” he says. “Tickets sell out in about seven seconds!”

That’s because the race draws so much attention from international riders and focusses on the pros. Yet, while it’s known as the Tour de France of Mountain Biking, the race’s additional draw card is making allowance for amateurs, attracting riders and sponsors alike.

Pierre was looking for a partner who was roughly at the same riding level as he was and who was prepared to pay for the entry. “I asked a couple of guys but not Fritz thinking he was

much younger. We had been on a few outrides together and knew each other's ability," he recounts ...

"Then I went to one of his races and realized he was forty years old and we could still compete in the masters. You want to compete in your age category because that's part of the fun. I said I had an entry but had to pay it in a week or two and he said he would ride with me."

Being an SA champ, Fritz has achieved plenty, doesn't have anything to prove and now participates for the sheer enjoyment ... and still does well. It's very important that you ride with someone of the right personality because clashing team mates are a recipe for disaster. "We're totally on the same page and out to have fun. We both have a good sense of humour and are extroverts, so I think we are going to gel nicely." said Pierre with confidence.

With Fritz's participation secured, Pierre visited Duncan Riley at DWR Distribution, who was hugely enthusiastic about the whole competition. "It was a great celebration, with Josef Valchar from Robe agreeing to sponsor the riders which is amazing," affirms Duncan and both riders.

Sunday kicks off with the race broadcast on television. Check the DWR Distribution Group on Facebook for regular updates during this Epic race!







