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## **Songo.Info win first stage of Cape Epic**

March 29 2008 at 09:46PM

Johannesburg - Young South African mountain biker, Burry Stander, proved he could compete with the best by finishing first with team-mate Christoph Sauser in the first stage of the world-renowned Cape Epic.

With only a 30 second gap between the first and second place winners, this year's event promises to be exciting to the last finish.

For stage one of the Epic, the 1 200 riders had to make the journey of 123km from Knysna to George, with the South African MTN Energade team Kevin Evans and David George leading the way after their prologue win on Friday (which also took place in Knysna). The first leg of the 8-stage race challenged the aspiring amateurs and pro riders from around the world with a total climb of 3 091m.

Similar to previous years, the first stage was one of the toughest with a route profile that included a 3km first climb with a seven percent gradient at Simola Pass. Riders then had to make a turn into the lush, indigenous forests providing some of the most exquisite scenery the Garden Route has to offer.

This particular route was characterised by an abundance of sharp climbs, slippery corners and heart-in-the-stomach descents to test endurance early on in the race. The final challenge awaited riders after the Knysna River, Duiwelse Tande (the seventh pass of the day), before they completed Stage 1 at the Saasveld Campus of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in George.

The Songo.Info team of Christoph Sauser (SUI) and Burry Stander (RSA) was the first to cross the finish line of stage one at a time of 4:39:35. They are also the overall leaders of the race following Friday's prologue (overall time 5:12:05).

Twenty-year-old Stander from South Africa says that he found the first part of the race particularly difficult. "I suffered during the first 50kms and actually started to get worried, but with 50kms to go, my legs finally came back and I could help Christoph to win this part of the race."

Sauser said that he was incredibly impressed with his young South African partner. "We are thrilled that we were able to take the jersey for stage one. We were also particularly surprised that the other top teams couldn't keep up."

The Bulls team of Germans Karl Platt and Stefan Sahm came in second at a time of 4:40:06, which also secured them the second place overall (5:12:28).

Sahm fell ill the night before and did not feel in peak form during this stage. "Karl had to do all the work today as I just felt miserable. He was pushing hard and I struggled, but I'm thrilled to have such a great teammate."

Platt waited for his riding partner to catch up during certain parts of the stage, as they are a team. "I am proud of Stefan as we still managed to complete the race 30 seconds after Songo.Info," he said.

Teams Etto Hoydahl 3 and Etto Hoydahl 1 ensured some surprises when they came in third and fourth respectively (4:44:21 and 4:44:43), followed by Alb-Gold Mountainbike (4:45:36). They benefitted from the tough battle of the top teams as they were continuously going at their own pace, unaffected of what was going on in front of them. In the end they passed all the top contenders on the way to the finish.

After a very strong start, the yellow jersey leaders from the prologue, Evans and George, had to deal

with difficulties when Evans fell sick after the second water point and lost a lot of fluids as a result. They managed to complete the race and Evans was then put on a drip for mild hydration. Evans had to be supported by George for the last 30 km of the route, who pulled him by his jersey in order to complete stage one. - Sapa