

1997's East Coasters Virginia Championship Mountain Bike Series: Best Yet!

The East Coasters Virginia Championship Mountain Bike Series finished with a flourish on the slopes of Craig County's 4000' Potts Mountain on October 12th. When the dust settled, Charlottesville's Chris Eatough blazed his 4th consecutive series win — and the state champion's trophy — in a dominating performance in the men's pro/expert class. In the women's class, an ailing Lora Zimmerman of the East Coasters team, who had not planned on racing due to illness, rode with grit and determination as she captured the state title while finishing #2 to Charlottesville's Susan George.

The action of the eleven year old Craig County Escape (one of the oldest living races in the world) was a fitting finish to an adventure that began back in April with the infamous Dragon's Back. On that day, North Mountain pounded out yet another exciting day of true cross-country, cross-mountain, cross-rocks, racing. On that day, defending men's champion, Harrisonburg's Chris Scott (Trek) proved he had maintained form, taking the race over training partner Michael Carpenter. Eventual champion Chris Eatough was not present. On the women's side, recent Roanoke addition Julie Taylor (Schwinn) dominated the women's category, and looked undefeatable way beyond the foreseeable future.

When action moved to Franklin County on Memorial weekend, Chris Eatough asserted his presence and got to work erasing Dragon's Back's zero points score by winning both Saturday's Saturn Time Trial (thank you Fred McIlmurray) *and* the Rebel Ramble cross country on Sunday. Scott took second in the cross-country, third in the TT. Todd Reighly (Blue Ridge Outdoors), formerly of Boone's Mill and easily the one man with the most laps on the Franklin County Recreation Park course, showed that course knowledge is key in time trials, taking second in the Saturn event. Julie Taylor, again, was the only story in the women's category, winning, and yes, winning again.

By the time September 7th rolled around, and Blacksburg's Rowdy Dawg was up, anticipation of championship showdowns mounted. With the series largest field at nearly 200, racers attacked Brush Mountain's uncharacteristically dry trails. Chris Eatough, again, proved his mettle-to-pedal, winning the men's event. Scott had mechanicals, finishing 12th, but the dark horse Reighly began making his way to the head of the standings, finishing a respectable 5th (despite flatting), and settling in at #2 in the standings, just a single point aears of Scott. Eatough, while winning, still had points to make up. Headed into the final, Scott needed only to finish within 4 places of Eatough to defend his Dirt Rag leader's jersey, and the 1997's state championship.

In the women's category, the steamroller was a no-show; Julie Taylor was noticeably not there. That was no problem for Diana Kauzman, winning her first and only 1998 Virginia Championship Mountain Bike Series race. Susan George was second, followed by Lora Zimmerman, who took the Dirt Rag leader's jersey off the back of Taylor by a single point.

Now the adventure culminates on old Potts Mountain. Scott, Reighly, and Eatough are looked in mortal combat, and all came ready to race. Would Julie Taylor take the championship going away on Virginia's most demanding course?

Mechanical dysfunction was the story of the day. Scott had the championship in the bag, running second and strong, until an unfortunate ditch took his front wheel and jersey. With a positive outlook, Scott jogged the last 4 miles to the finish 13th. Reighly, too, could have taken

the prize if not for *multiple* problems, including shoes that would not stay together, tires that refused to hold air, and the like. Finishing 5th was an amazing performance for Reighly.

Of course, Eatough was on fire, blistering the 26 mile, 4000' vertical of climbing epic course in 2:09. His father Mike took the masters race, making it a double win day for the Eatoughs (Mike was last year's *world* downhill master's champion!).

Lora Zimmerman was looking green in the gills, but upon realizing the championship might well be hers, suited up and unexpectedly added the great Escape saga by winning the overall. Susan George won the first Escape of many in her life. Julie Taylor, again, was nowhere in sight.

There is at least one wonderful story for each of the 300+ competitors in this year's East Coasters Virginia Championship Mountain Bike Series. But space is limited, and writing your own story through experience is best. Plans for the 1998 Virginia Championship Mountain Bike Series are in motion, so we invite you to just come on out and do it. There are few cheaper, high intensity thrills than biking in the woods, and in one of the best regions in the mountain biking world: southwestern Virginia. The per biker trail-to-trail-mile ratio is higher (in favor of trail miles) than perhaps any other place in the *world*. The quality and quantity of riding options is makes the East Coasters series the premier off-road race event in the state. As a reward for this quality, the National Off Road Bicycle Association has awarded southwestern Virginia with a nationally recognized regional event September 26-27 of 1998. The American Mountain Bike Challenge Event will be held at a venue to be named, and will be combined with other east regional events from New York to Florida.