



## EVENTS

### TOUR DE QUEBEC STAGE RACE

Team H&R Block recently returned from Quebec City, where it competed in the inaugural Tour de Quebec stage race. The race, held over four days, included a prologue time trial, two road races, and two criteriums. As the event was new on the calendar, we knew little of what to expect in terms of the competition or the courses, except to expect technical Criterium riding, and short, sharp climbs in the road races. The team for the race included regulars Chris McNeil, Chris DeVries, Anthony Steenbergen, and a guest rider for the event, Zach Garland, on loan from Kona/Adobe. The race marked the first foray, as a team, into eastern Canada for H&R.

The prologue ITT had little meaning to the overall race, as it was only 250m in length. The course, lined with tourists and spectators, climbed slightly up Rue St. Jean in Old Quebec. Top H&R rider on the evening was Chris DeVries, in 11th position.

The first road race of the event was held on a circuit around the community of St. Joachim, located between the St. Lawrence River and Mt. Ste. Anne.

The race started on the circuit, but didn't finish on it, instead climbing up a nasty 19% grade for about 1 km to the line. The selection happened early in the race, with various attacks finally coalescing into a lead group of 10 riders. H&R placed one rider – Zach Garland – in the break, which went on to gain more than 5 minutes on the peloton. Behind the break, Chris McNeil successfully escaped the peloton with two other riders. In the end, Garland proved to be the strongest of the break, beating the others up the climb to the finish. In doing so, Garland took all the leaders' jerseys except the Sprinter's: best young rider, best climber, and best overall were all on Zach's back at the protocol ceremony. Behind Garland, McNeil finished in 12th position, while DeVries and Steenbergen came in with the shattered peloton.

Day 3 of the race featured a rarity amongst stage races – a double Criterium day! The morning event featured a technical course (13 corners in 2.7 km) in the centre of Quebec City, made more interesting by rain. Several crashes occurred in the early laps, with both Garland and DeVries hitting the deck. The race came to an unfortunate conclusion when a car errantly entered the course, taking out three riders in the peloton (no serious injuries sustained). The decision of the Chief Commissaire was to stop the race, with no general classification result. A five-rider breakaway, away at the time of the car incident, completed three laps to determine the stage winner (Charles Dionne – Successful Living/Parkpre).

After laundry, recovery, and wound treatment, it was off to the south-shore town of St. Romauld for the evening Criterium. The problem, of course, is that there isn't much evening on a rainy day in Quebec City in early September, so the planned 7 pm start was moved forward to 6:30 pm, and the race was cut in half, to just 22 km. Good news for H&R we thought – less time for things to go wrong in a sketchy Criterium. The peloton stayed pretty much together for this race, and as the light diminished the finish was (barely) in sight. An aggressive last lap led to some gaps in the pack at the finish, the result of which had Zach losing 6 seconds to stage winner Guillaume Boivan (EVA/DeVinci) and a few other riders. The classification became very interesting after the Criterium, with 3 riders (Garland, William Duggan of CCB/Volkswagen, and Bruno Langlois of VW/Specialized) virtually at same time, separated only by their respective tenths-of-a-second from the prologue. (Ties are broken in a Stage Race by the tenths-of-a-second from the Time Trial stage, which are otherwise not carried through on the overall time.)

Day 4, the final day of the race, was on hand after more laundry, wound treatment, and bike washing. An afternoon start was most welcome, as was the improving weather. The stage was an 11 km circuit race 13 times, and finishing on the requisite steep, nasty hill. An early break made the race very interesting, as it contained overall threat Charles Thibault (EVA/DeVinci), who became the virtual leader on the road. Solid work by H&R's DeVries, McNeil, and Steenbergen brought back significant time, and eventually the race came back together. After a period of aggressive riding, another move slipped off the front, this one containing both Criterium winners, Dionne and Boivin. This move was to stick, as the chase group couldn't coordinate a sustained effort. Dionne won the stage, while Garland finished in third place, just ahead of Langlois. Third place on the stage translated to third place on the general classification for Zach. Meanwhile, DeVries finished an excellent 7th on the stage (12th on GC), Steenbergen moved up to 18th on GC, and McNeil came back from the dead to finish a 11th on the stage, and 10th overall.

In sum, an excellent introduction to Quebec racing for the team, and an opportunity maximized to demonstrate that our Alberta-based outfit is for real, and can compete on the National scene.

- Andy Holmwood, Director Sportif

(Thanks to all the sponsors for making this trip, and the entire season, possible for the team. And thanks to the Elite team riders for working hard, racing well, and representing with class.)