

It takes a long time to get to Snowshoe, West Virginia. It will rain on you once you make it there. You will have to carry your bike through unrideable mud sections. You will smash into trees, slip off of wet roots, and slide on your helmet down slick slopes. You will get bruised legs, sore ankles, and fatigued triceps, but laughter is sure to follow each ungraceful move, and be sure to celebrate every time you clean a rooty section that you previously thought impossible, because this is mountain biking at its best!

This was my fourth trip to Snowshoe, West Virginia, and I think I arrived with a bad attitude. Fortunately, on Friday we did our PreRide with the Pros for a group of about 8 women, and boy did it change my attitude! We had a fabulous time sliding down hills and getting caught out in a torrential downpour. One of our girls even went on to win her race in the beginner class. I came out of this PreRide feeling renewed in my outlook towards this challenging terrain, and reminded that mountain biking is about having fun!

Once again I had some pre-race mechanical issues that I could not have fixed without the help of some very kind and generous souls in the pits. RockShox AGAIN replaced my uppers, as this time I had found a large scratch in the stanchion tube, and Shimano replaced a spoke that I messed up during a crash. Thank goodness for the support these companies have given me and the rest of our Ford Cycling team. If these are the companies that support mountain biking, then as mountain bikers, we should support them too!

Come race day, the weather had cleared up but had left in its wake long sections of mud bogs. I was called up in second place so far in the series, so I got a choice starting position and made the most of it. I got off the line quickly and entered the single track in the top 5, right where I wanted to be. Two girls cleaned some technical stuff better than the next four of us, so they made a quick getaway along the tricky traverses. But we all hung in there and essentially regrouped by the first big climb. Soon, however, the 3 Luna women had amassed at the front and pulled away from me, Kerry Barnholt, Kelli Emmett, and Willow Koerber. More than anything I wanted to break up that Luna party, but they were all riding stronger than the rest of us, and we were unable to reel them in. There was plenty of back and forth among the four of us for a variety of reasons: some people are better in the traverses, others better at the climbs, others better at the running sections, and one time I passed Kelli because her shoe came off in the mud! Ultimately, Kelli climbed up the last hills faster than I did, but I climbed them faster than Willow, so I finished a very strong 5<sup>th</sup> place. I seem to be on a cross country podium streak, and I couldn't be happier about it. I must have chosen well with my Bontrager Jones ACX tires because I had very little accumulation of mud. I was also thankful for riding my K2 hardtail: it was quick and responsive in the technical stuff, and super light to carry through the running sections.

The next day was the short track, and although it was foggy out the temperature was just right for full tilt, ride-till-you-barf, racing. I got off to another good start, and as the pace increased I found that I was able to stay in good position to follow moves, yet stay on the right wheels so I wouldn't have to work too much. About mid-way through the 20 minutes I saw the pace let up, so I attacked, hoping to begin breaking things up. It worked, and a group of 4 of us made a separation. Just as the race was starting to really heat up for the win, I powered up this tough, two-pedal-stroke hill in my big ring (cross-gearred of course) and snapped my derailleur hanger. At first I thought I had just dropped my chain and I started to fix it, but alas, it was broken and my race was over! Oh well. That is racing for you! I was fortunate once again to be able to lean on Shimano for replacing a bunch of parts, and I should be good to go for next weekend in Vermont! Stay tuned...