

TEAM SOLE

29 October, 2007 - Buzios-Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The dust has settled, the music has died, and we're just tripping over the hundreds, maybe thousands of gear items sprawled out all over the race base camp.

EcoMotion 2007 is complete; everyone is in safe and sound. This race has built itself up to be the top, must do adventure event in the world. Team SOLE was returning as '06 champions...expectations were high but this year's field was just a bit more stacked than last year's.

Per usual, we would take a humble approach to this event. There are about 1 million things that must go right just to even finish these expedition races, and to even boast of riding on last year's glory is just not our style. Adventure gods can and do strike down upon thee with great vengeance anytime arrogance shows its head.

The players are Paul and Karen as usual co-captains, Marcel Hagener our 2007 3rd man and our work horse addition Eric 'Sully' Sullivan from Crested Butte Colorado. We raced with Sully in China where his uphill speed and strength got us on the podium, and we'd need that again here in Brazil. The hills in Brazil are serious here, and pretty much nonstop.

In this expedition race we also need a support crew. These are friends of ours that volunteer for 1 week of slave labor: hauling our gear around, and of making sure we have all the resources we need. We'd have for the 3rd year, our friend Cesar from Porto Allegre (in the south), and for the 2nd year Carlino from Rio, then a new comer named Leo who is a guide in the local mountains. The support crew's job is often thankless, and always long and hard. It's a heap of responsibility and vital to team success. Our crew this year is 1/2 of our 2006 winning team, it's lighter and leaner and would prove a bit overwhelmed as the race went on.

We often say the hardest part of racing is simply getting to the start line, and that was again the case. Karen and Sully both needed visa's to get into Brazil (Paul had a 5-year, and Marcel- being German- didn't need one). It came down to the wire for both of them allowing for virtually no error on the airlines part. Marcel and Paul arrive early, get in some beach time and unpack. Karen arrives just 48 hours before start, and then the bad news rolls in. Sully gets delayed and misses his connection due to SNOW in Colorado. Unreal situation and suddenly our whole effort is on hoping for Sully to score back to back standby flights getting from Chicago, Washington D.C., then Rio. Being the pro that he is, after 2.5 days he pulls it off, and arrives to the race venue with a smile with just minutes to spare before the pre race meeting. It's not the ideal mind and body rest needed before a 4-6 day non-stop expedition, but at least he's on location.

Our race starts at one of the most recognizable locations in the world, at the base of 'Sugarloaf Mtn.', in the heart of Rio de Janeiro, in the shadow of the awesome Christo statue. It's sunny, warm and surreal to be in the heart of a massive city to start an adventure race.

The gun goes off at 11pm, for the start of an 8-10 hour kayak section, into the back bay of Rio, plunging us into dark, swampy, mangrove terrain. An immense amount of controversy and confusion would come from the very first checkpoint. It's in the wrong place. This is a bad, bad thing in adventure racing. Despite leading the pack on the kayak

section, we'd finish 5th for this section...40 minutes off the lead...a fair bit after only 1 section but LOADS of adventure lie ahead. For the next 3 days, the rain would move in and pretty much never let up. It took 18 hours for us to rally back, catch then pass the leaders: France and New Zealand. We'd even put 1 hour on them during a very demanding trek into a technical mountaineering section.

Things are looking good until our solo navigator situation (every other top team has a minimum of two to share the map in the wee, sleepy hours) comes into play. Slight bit of confusion, sparse trails and we lose a critical 1 hour, get passed by 3 teams and settle into 4th. We're in the interior, so essential we go from trek to mt. bike and back to trek for the next 3 days. At one point the 5th place team of Sweden catches us, we'd chat about old times... then our speed and strength took over and we'd pull away, and nearly catch the 3rd place New Zealand team ORION Health.

It's rare we get to do something new and different in adventure racing, but leave it to EcoMotion to step it up. Using a tool and system borrowed from the people of the region of Bahia, we would travel for 15km/3 hours on rail tracks, using a giant oversized skateboard of sorts...push powered by bamboo sticks as if you were in a canoe. They use these to transport supplies between villages This was a blast, until some design flaws had us carrying this 100lb skateboard for 1/2 the time. Our tempers were running thin, and teamwork was pushed to the max. When it was all said and done, we had the best moving system of the race, and made up some time.

The team is moving well, managing sleep properly and keeping the bikes in full function, something we've had a history of extensive problems while in Brazil. We're actually reeling in the top 3 teams a bit as we make our way back to the ocean for a 25 km kayak to the finish...but time is running low. This event is short, yes 444km and 70-80 hours is short in our world. We'd need more time to let our experience work for us, and let other teams make more mistakes.

It's relatively good company we are keeping, top 3 teams were 2-3-4 in the Scotland Worlds just a few months ago, and the two teams behind us were 5-6 in the Worlds as well. The lead 2 teams of Spain and France got onto the ocean first. Super rough seas and high winds caused a course hold JUST behind them, and in front of us, causing a 'dark zone'. We'd be allowed to sleep for 4 hours, for free...before a last kayak section.

All we'd need to do is keep ourselves into our kayak for 6 hours in some relatively rough seas and cross wind and we'd hold onto our position.

The tiny village of Buzios and a few handfuls of the organization staff would greet us at a tiny white sand beach that would be our finish line. 84 hours and 444km/300miles of nonstop adventure racing landed us 4th place in the most important adventure event of the year.

We thank every one of our sponsors and supporters that help us tour the podiums of the most grueling adventure events of the world. The adventures of 2007 do not stop just yet, our team will be seen in China, Island of Guadeloupe, possibly Portugal and of course Aconcagua for Jordan Romero's #4 Peak.



TEAM SOLE

Thanks to Theo Ribeiro for these amazing images from the race.
(Please contact Team SOLE if you are interested in using these photos.)

