



**Suzuki 24 Hour Series Opener Won by Wheeler, O'Dea
Lichtenwalner, other O'Dea in close contention**

Temecula, Calif. - Chuck Wheeler and Namrita O'Dea emerged as the solo winners, and series leaders, at round one of the 2008 Suzuki 24 Hour National Point Series, the Suzuki 24 Hours of Vail Lake, which was raced and won over a scorching April 26/7 weekend at Vail Lake Mountain Resort in Temecula, California.

This was the first win for both [Wheeler](#) and [O'Dea](#) in the [Suzuki Auto](#) sponsored series.

[Chuck Wheeler](#), a seasoned 24 hour racer from Scottsdale, Az, overcame the heat, the 2007 series champion [Rob Lichtenwalner](#), of Nazareth, Pa. and seasoned contender [Eddie O'Dea](#), of Atlanta, Ga, on a scenic and hilly [10.22 mile course](#) with 1498 feet of climbing.

A heatwave that surprised even the locals drove temperatures well into the 90s. After pushing hard through the afternoon many riders welcomed the nightfall, but then began to feel how much extra energy they'd spent in keeping cool during the heat of the day.

The heat-acclimatized [Wheeler](#), who rode true to his style of coming from behind, finally caught [Lichtenwalner](#) as darkness fell. A quick look at the [Story Board™](#) - a new functionality added to the [RealTime™](#) scoring system - reveals that these two swapped the lead a few times midway through race, but eventually Wheeler proved more consistent during the night than Lichtenwalner. [Wheeler](#) completed 17 laps, compared to [Lichtenwalner's](#) 15. [O'Dea](#) finished third with 13 laps.

"I don't really have a strategy," explained [Wheeler](#), "I just go out and ride and try to stay constant. It works less frequently now that a lot of riders are getting so good," he smiled.

[Lichtenwalner](#) was not making any excuses, but he said: "I'm not used to racing in these kinds of temperature." At 9 o'clock on Sunday morning,

he made some calculations, realized that he wasn't going to catch [Chuck Wheeler](#), and that third-placed [Eddie O'Dea](#) wasn't going to catch him, so he climbed off and went for an early sleep. "I'm happy with second place points. It gets my series title defense off to a good start," he said.

[Eddie O'Dea](#) reported serious overheating problems during the day, and then difficulty getting his lights correctly set up during the night. "It just wasn't a good race for me," he said on a balmy Sunday evening at the complimentary athlete's banquet provided by [Suzuki Auto](#).



Namrita O'Dea
credit: Tom Weigand trweigand.com

[Namrita O'Dea](#), Eddie's spouse, won the women's solo race with 11 laps, ahead of [Terri Wahlberg](#) on 10, who repeated her second place at this venue in 2007. [Liz Baumgardt-Kays](#) finished third with eight laps. 2006 [Race Across America](#) winner, [Shanna Armstrong](#), was in contention with O'Dea for much of the first day, and looked the stronger climber, but after two painful falls on her left femur during the early night, [Armstrong](#) - who was using this race as training for her [Badwater Ultramarathon](#) attempt this July - decided to exit the race.

[Namrita O'Dea](#) was bouyed by her win. "It was very challenging with the heat. But I monitored my pace and my nutrition and hydration, and was able to remain constant through the night. Even though it was not a high mileage race, there was a lot of climbing, and with the heat it was very tough," said the nutrition student, who is planning to compete in four of the series races. "I think I have a chance for the series overall. I'm not sure who else is doing the series, but I think I have a chance," she said.



Massey (left) and Miller (right)

The Duo Pro category was dominated by Colorado mountain bikers [Dean Miller](#), of Littleton, and [Dax Massey](#), of Boulder, who comprised the [Shake and Bake](#) team. These two led the race outright for most of the first 12 hours, but through the night the two single-speeders succumbed to the greater horsepower of the four-person Men's Expert team of [Grizzly Outfitters/Continental Construction](#), from Big Sky, Montana. In the end Shake and Bake completed 24 laps to the Grizzly Outfitters's 25.

Also notable was the monumental struggle in the four-person Men's Sport category. After going hammer and tongs with the the [Manic Monkey Riders](#) during the afternoon heat, the [Simi Cycling Center](#) bike shop team finally moved into the lead as darkness fell. Riding with remarkable consistency, and no speed decay at all, the Simi Cycling Center riders gradually stretched out all the way to the finish, and recorded a hugely impressive total of 24 laps. The Manic Monkeys called it a day at 21 laps, and third place was claimed by the tenacious [Naval Special Warfare Flyin' Frogs](#) team, who ended the race with 20 laps.



Simi Cycling Center rider MRT Robles

The [Suzuki 24 Hour National Point Series](#) now travels to Conyers, Ga, to the same course where mountain biking made its Olympic Games debut back in 1996, for Round Two on May 17 & 18. While the temperature might still be high, the course is substantially more flat, so expect to see the big power riders come to the fore.

Thereafter the series goes to:

- Big Bear, WVa, June 7/8**
- Killington, Vt, July 26/27**
- Landahl, Mo, September 20/21**
- Moab, Ut, October 11/12**

For more information about the [Suzuki 24 Hour National Point Series](#), please visit www.grannygear.com.

-30-

About Granny Gear Productions

Granny Gear Productions, a sports marketing and event production company, has earned a reputation as mountain biking's most innovative and successful event organizer. With more than 26 years as a mountain bike race promoter, Granny Gear President and CEO, Laird Knight, created the 24-hour racing format in 1991. In 2001, Knight became West Virginia Tourism's Person-of-the-Year and in 2002, Knight was inducted into The Mountain Bike Hall of Fame.

In 2000, GGP created its unprecedented and unrivaled RealTime™ Scoring System, that tracks every rider and every lap, posting results for every team in real-time on the web. www.grannygear.com

About Suzuki

The Brea, Calif.-based Automotive Operations of American Suzuki Motor Corporation was founded in 1985 by parent company Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) and currently markets its vehicles in the United States through a network of approximately 500 automotive dealerships in 49 states. Based in Hamamatsu, Japan, SMC is a diversified worldwide automobile, motorcycle and outboard motor manufacturer with sales of more than two million new automobiles annually. Founded in 1909 and incorporated in 1920, SMC has operations in 187 countries. For more information, visit www.media.suzukiauto.com.

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