



Swiss Open Championships

The world's toughest national league comes down to a nail-biting finale.

Reporting by Anja Kroll, photos by Martin Scheel

August 1-5 the Swiss Open Championships took place in Anzère (Valais). Almost 100 pilots from 13 nations participated, including the Valic brothers from Slovenia, the current French champion Toma Merigout, Martin Orlik from the Czech Republic, Jinh Kim from Korea, Keiko Hiraki from Japan and Marina Olexina from Russia. Unfortunately, the competition wasn't blessed with good weather conditions and only three tasks were scored.

While waiting for the start gate to open on the first day, the participants enjoyed watching Urs Löttscher gliding high above the peaks as he competed in the Red Bull X-Alps race. However, as flyable as it was for the X-Alps, the conditions weren't reliable enough for a championship task, and the day was cancelled.

Following a day of rain, better weather came in from the west on Friday. An elapsed time race of 47 km was set from Cret du Midi over Vercorin as far as Zinal and back. Even though the race didn't start until 4 pm, the conditions were still good. Andy

Aebi won, ahead of Michael Witschi and Chrigel Maurer. Anja Kroll was first in for the women, ahead of Chrigel's newly-wed wife, Karin Maurer, nee Appenzeller.

Saturday brought beautiful but stable conditions and a 49 km elapsed time race from Anzère that only eight pilots could complete. The successful pilots set off later in the day and managed to climb to 3,000 m. Andy Aebi won again, followed by Stefan Wyss.

Overall this gave Aebi a lead of 120 points before the third and final task. However, with the phenomenon that is Chrigel Maurer in the competition, anything could still happen. As the last day dawned Andy and Chrigel had everything to race for.

A warm, unstable day awaited the competitors on the Sunday. With a high cloudbase of around 3,700 m, those that climbed high enjoyed wonderful views of the Swiss Alps once the start gate opened. Chrigel Maurer showed his outstanding qualities in the short 56 km race and beat Aljaz Valic into goal

by almost eight minutes. With Chrigel waiting in goal, and Aebi still flying the task, every second that ticked by ate away at Aebi's 120 point lead.

Even when Andy Aebi rolled in fifth, no one could tell which way the sword of fortune would swing. It took till the prize-giving ceremony before the riddle was solved: Andy had beaten Chrigel by just 10 points and won the Swiss Open Championships for the first time. **X**

RESULTS

Men's

- | | | | |
|---|----------------|----|---------|
| 1 | Andy Aebi | CH | Advance |
| 2 | Chrigel Maurer | CH | Advance |
| 3 | Stefan Wyss | CH | Gin |

Women's

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-----|---------|
| 1 | Anja Kroll | CH | Gin |
| 2 | Karin Maurer (Appenzeller) | CH | Advance |
| 3 | Keiko Hiraki | JPN | Gin |