

The 35. Swissalpine event a great success – despite extraordinary circumstances.

Great solo run by Matthias Kyburz

The 35. Swissalpine event in Davos passed the Corona test and successfully launched the new K68 race. On this new major distance the Italian Riccardo Montani was the surprise winner after a dramatic finish. On Sunday, orienteering specialist Matthias Kyburz had a sensational solo run and pulverized the K43 course record. The women's K43 race was won by Natascha Baer.

Mountain runners are early risers. At 7 AM sharp on Sunday the runners were sent off on the K43 race. Matthias Kyburz was remarkably awake: the world class orienteering specialist from Berne distanced his fellow competitors immediately at the start of the 42.7 kilometer course (+/-1324m) and practically ran a solo race. With a finishing time of 3:00:16,7 hours he set a new course record and beat second placed Kévin Vermeulen of France by more than 15 minutes. Despite this incredible pace, Kyburz later spoke about a well-paced and controlled race, even in the steep ascent to the Scaletta pass. The narrow alpine trails had been a special highlight on the course, he said.

In the women's race the Swiss Natascha Baer, current Swiss Champion on the marathon distance, and the orienteering specialist Sabrina Jenzen delivered a thrilling battle. On the ascents Baer was faster, on the descents Jenzen. With twelve kilometers to the finish line Baer was finally able to break away and crossed the finish line in 3:48:44,2 hours. Jenzen came in second four minutes later.

In the K10 race Laurien van der Graaf, the elite cross-country skier from Davos, had to let Nicole Egger (CH) pass after 9.3 kilometers on the course. The long distance runner and current Swiss Champion impressed with a finish in 36:19,2 minutes. Timo Trinidad (CH) won the men's race in 34:57,3 minutes. Had Nicole Egger started with the men, she would have placed fifth, which underscores her strong performance.

Montani conquered the new K68 race

The Corona virus made modifications to the organization of the 35. Swissalpine event necessary. As a protective measure all runners wore a face mask until they had ran out of the stadium in Davos, and there were no spectators present at the start or at the finish line. The new main distance, the K68 race with altogether 2606 m altitude difference which took the runners over four alpine passes, along the Panorama trail between the Scaletta and the Sertig passes, through no less than eight alpine valleys, was a resounding success. After a spectacular sprint on the final kilometer, the 27-year old Italian Riccardo Montani (Nomen est Omen for this mountain runner) caught up with the Swiss Raphael Sprenger, who had held the lead

for a good part of the race, and won the race in 6:12:28,2 hours, an initial course record. Sprenger crossed the finish line only 16 seconds later.

Vasinova in a class of her own

The seven-time Swissalpine winner Jasmine Nunige unfortunately had to withdraw from the women's K68 race before the halfway mark, after the descent from the Sertig pass. Nunige battles a hip injury since several weeks. Having gone through physical therapy Nunige had felt fit and ready for the race, however the recurring pain finally forced her to withdraw. Among the other runners, the 31-year old Marcela Vasinova (CZ), who currently lives in Salzburg, Austria, was able to complete her race without problems. She had only signed up for the K68 race on the Tuesday before the race. She dominated the women's race and finished first in 6:59:12,1 hours. Second placed Katrin Götz (CH) lost 21 minutes to Vasinova and Luzia Bühler (CH) who finished third, 30 minutes. In the men's race Vasinova would have finished 14.

Rüesch triumphant in the K23 race

In the end there would be a winner for the organizing town of Davos: Jason Rüesch, the local elite cross-country skier won the K23 (+634 m/-235 m) race from Klosters to Davos in 1:31:00,9 hours. Rüesch was able to distance the Liechtenstein runner Arnold Aemisegger, K23 winner in 2019, on the descent towards the Lake Davos after the highest point in the race. Aemisegger in the end finished almost two minutes after Rüesch. In the women's K23 race Shelly Schenk won in 1:47:36,3 hours, 45 seconds ahead of Austria's Lena Laukner and a good two minutes ahead of the Swiss Marketa Maly.

Effective Corona precautionary measures

Andrea Tuffli, President of the Swissalpine Organizing Committee was rightly pleased with the successful event. "The athletic performances have been absolutely extraordinary, and we have been able to welcome more top athletes than ever before", he said. Tuffli also concluded that the Corona precautionary measures e.g. at the start and the finish line, had proven feasible and effective. "As the races started in a staged manner, we were able to ensure that the number of persons gathered in one place never reached anything approaching the limit of 1000 persons stipulated by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health."