
Bruni and Blewitt earn downhill wins to open Crankworx Rotorua

Follow Crankworx World Tour MTB action this week down in New Zealand.

The 2023 Crankworx World Tour kicked off on Sunday in Rotorua's Whakarewarewa Forest as the world's best downhillers were put to the test with Frenchman Loïc Bruni and Kiwi Jess Blewitt both winning. **Here is all you need to know:**

- The Rotorua track is known for its rooty chutes and ruts which can be challenging on a dry day, but absolutely menacing in the wet and - after a downpour of rain two days before finals - the track dried up for tacky dirt conditions with a few "choose your own adventure" rut sections.

- Five-time world champion Bruni - the number one Elite Men seed - was able to keep his composure through the challenging conditions with the fastest time of 3:00.348, which just edged out Sweden's Oliver Zwar (3:00.692) with American Neko Mulally third in a time of 3:01.287.

- Nice native Bruni, 28, said: "My run was pretty late in the day, so it was tough to stay in the headspace especially with it getting darker in the woods. I did pretty good on the top sections, but I couldn't really adapt to the track. I did a few small mistakes, but I was feeling fast by the time I reached the bottom. Feeling like I am starting the season in the best way, so I am feeling stoked."

- Blewitt won her first World Tour gold medal in the Elite Women category, after winning the junior category in 2020, with compatriots Jenna Hastings second (3:42.234) and Shania Rawson third (3:45.540).

- Blewitt, 20, said: "My run went to plan. My plan being to keep it rubber side down and that worked. I had got a little bit loose in a few spots, but overall pretty happy. Rotorua is a hard track in that you don't know how much you can really push, but I think it was a smart race run."

Results - RockShox Taniwha Downhill

- 1) Loic Bruni (FRA) 3:00.348 // Jess Blewitt (NZL) 3:35.792
- 2) Oliver Zwar (SWE) 3:00.692 // Jenna Hastings (NZL) 3:42.234
- 3) Neko Mulally (USA) 3:01.287 // Shania Rawson (NZL) 3:45.540