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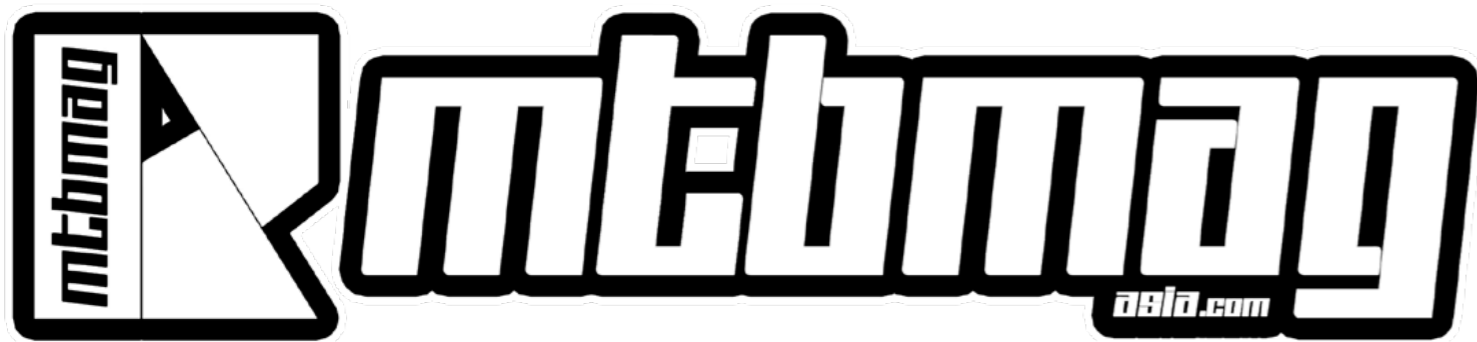
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HISTORY MADE IN THE MOUNTAINS



모나 용평



PHOTOS: MESUM VERMA

WORDS: MESUM VERMA

The First UCI MTB World Cup in Asia

AMAURY PIERRON AT THE START AT MONA YONGPYONG

RACE REPORT

History Made in the Mountains: [The First UCI MTB World Cup in Asia](#)

MONA YongPyong Resort, South Korea | Round 1, WHOOP UCI Mountain Bike World Series 2026

When the UCI announced that South Korea would host the opening round of the 2026 Mountain Bike World Series — combining both XCO and Downhill under the same roof — it was clear that history was about to be made. For the first time ever, an UCI Mountain Bike World Cup was coming to Asia. For anyone who loves this

sport, this was not something to miss.

I had been to the area before, back in 2002, working as a snowboard photographer near Pyeongchang at the Phoenix Park. Coming back now, for a completely different sport, felt surreal. Some accreditation drama aside, flights and hotels were booked, and I was ready to make the trip.

[Walking the Track: Raw, Loose and Unforgiving](#)

Arriving ahead of race week, I had the chance to join the Track Walk for the Downhill — one of my favourite moments at any World Cup. There is nothing quite like standing at the top of a course with the world's best riders, hearing their raw first impressions



ORBEA FMD RACING TEAM GOING FOR THE TRACKWALK



of a trail they have never ridden before.

One thing to note from the start: the Downhill finish was located at a different spot from the XCO venue. A gondola from the XCO area could be brought up to the Downhill start, and a shuttle bus handled the return. Walking the 5km back would not only take forever, it would mean going uphill to arrive at the bottom of a downhill course — not exactly ideal. The shuttle worked fine, and it was a smooth operation. The track itself? Natural. Brutally natural. The first few metres looked like a familiar bike park — small rollers, some berms — but that feeling quickly disappeared. What followed was a raw, ungraded mountain face covered in loose rock. In many sections, there was barely a trail to speak of, just poles marking where you were supposed to go.

Reactions from riders were mixed, as they always are. Some complained it was too loose, too unpredictable. But others — particularly the juniors — seemed completely at home. The standout moment came about two-thirds down the course, where a massive gap jump lurked. The elite women were hesitant, questioning the landing. The junior women the following day? They just hit it — all the way to the bottom. That said it all.

It is worth mentioning: both the Downhill and the XCO trails were designed and built by builders from the West. This is simply the reality of where elite trail construction expertise currently sits — it has nothing to do with Asia not being capable. As the sport grows in the region, that will change.

Old Faces, New Venue

No World Cup is complete without certain familiar faces, and sure enough, Sven Martin and Boris Beyer were there — the two photographers you will find at virtually every race on the circuit. Seeing them again, and heading up the chairlift together to watch the first riders drop into the course, felt like the proper start of a race week. Slowly but surely, teams arrived at the start gate and began making their way down. Each run looked different from the last. That is the nature of a trail like this: loose, technical, unpredictable — every descent a new puzzle.

Asia on the Downhill Start List: Eight Riders, One Goal

Eight riders representing Asia entered the Downhill, all of them going through the second qualifying round. It was always going to be a tall order — even established World Cup regulars struggle to make the finals these days. But these eight showed up, and that matters.

A special mention goes to Mio Suemasa, the 2025 Japan National Champion who was also on the start list. At 43 years old, she is by far the oldest woman competing in Downhill on the World Cup circuit — a full ten years older than Veronika Widmann, and racing in a field where most women are between 20 and 30. Her comeback story deserves its own feature, and we will come back to it. Seeing her on course was genuinely special.





Asian Riders — DHI Qualifying 2 Results

Pos.	Rider	Time	Nat.
40.	Yuga Ikuta	3:07.144	JPN
46.	Sheng Shan Chiang	3:10.807	TPE
51.	Yuki Kushima	3:18.191	JPN
53.	Agung Apriliano	3:24.946	INA
56.	Jongyun Park	3:47.808	KOR
58.	Tetsuma Haguchi	5:20.358	JPN
59.	Junho Bae	9:01.348	KOR
DNS	Jinhyeong Lee	—	KOR

Mio Suemasa (JPN) — Women's DHI Qualifying 2

Pos.	Rider	Time	Nat.
15.	Mio Suemasa	4:34.187	JPN

Race Day Downhill: The Youngsters Have Arrived

Race day for the Downhill opened with the Women's Juniors. Rosa Zierl, winner of the qualifying round, went last down the hill and smashed her qualifying time by ten seconds. But it was not enough. Aletha Ostgaard was 2.4 seconds faster, posting a time of 3:13.937 — the fastest women's time of the entire day. Harriet Harnden missed the podium by just 0.3 seconds, having led through qualifying.

In the Women's Elite, Valentina Höll was not exactly falling in love with the track — she made no secret of that — but she delivered when it counted and took the win. The real drama unfolded in the Men's Elite. Jackson Goldstone, one of the pre-race favourites, struggled all week to find his rhythm on this trail. He went down after the third split and crossed the line in 26th place — not the result anyone expected from him. Meanwhile, the 19-year-old Alran twins had a remarkable day: Till finished 6th, Max 9th, both as first-year elite riders.

Amaury Pierron was on a mission to take down Loïc Bruni's time, and he was doing exactly that right up until the final forest section — where his front wheel slipped out. Nobody has ever remounted a crashed bike as quickly as Pierron did. Despite the fall, he still claimed 3rd place, just two seconds off the winner.

And the winner? Asa Vermette. Nineteen years old. First race as an elite. First in qualifying. First in the final. The performance was so dominant, so composed, that it is almost difficult to process. He simply rode away from everyone.

Looking at the top ten, a picture emerges: three 19-year-olds (Vermette, the Alran twins), two 21-year-olds (Pontvianne, Pinkerton) — and five experienced riders in their late 20s and early 30s (Bruni, Pierron, Vergier, Kolb, Maes). Fifty-fifty. The next generation is not knocking on the door anymore. They are already inside.

[The XCO Track: A Different Kind of Challenge](#)

After the Downhill Track Walk on Wednesday, I took time to walk the XCO course



43 YEARS OLD MIO SUEMASA FROM JAPAN



alone and get a feel for it. From the start, there was an immediate climb through open grassland, made harder by large stone blocks placed strategically to break up momentum. I had a brief moment of wondering if I was walking the wrong way — but no, this was intentional and correct.

The course featured a notable ‘road gap’ — not over an actual road, but a large purpose-built ramp launching riders into a descent. Some sections of uphill were extremely steep. In dry conditions, they would be challenging but rideable. That word — ‘dry’ — would prove to be the key factor.

[Short Track Friday: Racing Begins — Asia Watches On](#)

Friday evening brought the Short Track races, and with them the real start of competition. The atmosphere at YongPyong picked up noticeably. Unfortunately, there was almost no Asian representation in the Short Track field. In the men’s category, no Asian riders were on the start list. In the women’s, Indonesian rider Sayu Dewi was the sole representative — but was unable to finish the race. A tough first experience of World Cup Short Track, but one she can build on.

[XCO Sunday: Asia Turns Up in Numbers](#)

By Sunday, the full scale of Asian participation in the XCO became clear — and it was genuinely impressive. Across all categories, 12 men from Asian nations lined up for the Elite race alone, with additional representation across U23 men, U23 women,

and Elite women.

The night before had brought heavy rain, and by race morning, the course had transformed. In Asian conditions, rain does not simply make trails slippery — it turns certain soils into something close to thick glue. As someone who has raced many times in exactly these conditions, I can tell you: getting uphill in that mud is incredibly hard, and trying to run with the bike is barely any easier.

Some riders were vocal about their frustration. I understand it — this sport has moved towards high-speed, technically precise circuits, and a track like this in wet conditions takes you somewhere else entirely: closer to cyclo-cross than World Cup XCO. But I also find myself thinking about where this sport came from. When I

started racing as a kid, running sections of track was just part of racing. If the weather made something unrideable, you ran. That was mountain biking.

The Swiss riders had no such complaints. In conditions that seemed to suit those trained in European mountain rain, riders from Switzerland swept to victory in three of the four categories. The only exception was in U23 Women, where a Swiss rider took second. The results were not a coincidence.

Asian XCO Riders: Showing Up and Pushing Through

Despite the brutal conditions, two Chinese riders in the Women's Elite field stood out for all the right reasons: Zhenglan Liang finished 18th and Zhifan Wu finished



PODIUM MEN: WINNER ASA VERMETTE



24th, both completing all five laps. In that mud, on that course, finishing the full race was itself an achievement. They did more than that.

The course configuration was adjusted on the day due to conditions. U23 Women completed six laps of a 2.5km shortened circuit, skipping the start loop. U23 Men and Elite Men did six laps of the full 3.4km course (reduced from the planned seven). Elite Women completed five laps of 3.4km.

Across the other categories, almost all Asian riders were forced to withdraw before completing the full distance — the conditions were simply too severe. It was hard to watch, but also a reminder of the gap that still exists in terms of preparation and experience at this level. That gap closes with exactly this kind of racing.

XCO Race Winners

Category	Winner	Country	Time
U23 Women	Valentina Corvi	ITA	1:07:33
U23 Men	Nicolas Halter	SUI	1:26:13
Elite Women	Sina Frei	SUI	1:27:03
Elite Men	Dario Lillo	SUI	1:24:36

Looking Ahead: Room to Grow, Reason to Return

What happened at MONA YongPyong was not perfect — no first-time World Cup ever is. But it was genuinely good, and the things that need improving are fixable.

The Downhill trail raised some specific safety points worth addressing. The B-line at one section ended dangerously close to the landing of a jump — in training, a faster rider on the A-line landed on a slower rider on the B-line. The result was a serious injury requiring surgery. This is entirely preventable with better course design, and it must be addressed before next year. B-lines need to route clearly around jump landings, not into them. Marshals, too, need to act faster in situations like this — a yellow flag should go up immediately. Given that the same marshals were not present

each day, some form of training and continuity is essential.

Speaking of marshals: the UCI should take a much harder look at how this role is staffed and compensated. Every 10 to 20 metres there is a marshal on a Downhill course. They are volunteers, and that is understandable at many events — but at a World Cup, for a course as technical and consequential as this one, some form of payment or meaningful benefit would go a long way towards getting better-prepared, more consistent people in those positions.

There is also a simple fix for the rock problem on the Downhill: more officials clearing loose rocks from the trail. The current crew of three did a good job, but the number is nowhere near enough. More hands would create more lines and reduce



ZHIFAN WU FROM CHINA



the ‘one-line’ effect that occurs when loose rocks are pushed to the edges, making riders afraid to go wide.

For the XCO, the muddy course will generate opinions for months. My own view is that cancelling a race because of mud sets a dangerous precedent. If the trail is physically unsafe, stop. If it is just very hard, race. Mountain biking was built on courses exactly like that one. The builders — again, from the West — could perhaps factor in Asian soil conditions more deliberately when designing courses in this part of the world. But if conditions are dry, this track would be excellent. Rain made it a cyclo-cross race. That is a weather problem, not a design failure.

I plan to speak with several teams once things settle down, to understand what

they felt was missing and what they would want to see done differently. The race is returning to South Korea for the next two years. That feedback loop matters.

[A Historic Opening Round](#)

For Asian mountain biking, this event was meaningful beyond the results. Twenty-plus riders from across the continent — Japan, South Korea, China, Indonesia, Taiwan — lined up at a UCI Mountain Bike World Cup on home soil for the first time in history. They raced in genuinely difficult conditions, some of them against riders who have been doing this for a decade at this level.

Some finished. Some did not. All of them showed up.

The Downhill final ended with a 19-year-old standing on top of the podium in his first elite race, and the top ten split evenly between the next generation and the old guard. The XCO featured mud that rewrote the script and a Swiss clean sweep that nobody predicted. And somewhere in the middle of all of it, a 43-year-old Japanese national champion dropped into a World Cup Downhill course and reminded everyone watching why this sport is worth caring about.

What a start. See you all in South Korea next year.



DARIO LILLO (SUI) - WINNER XCO MEN ELITE

RISING RIDE

A BIKE BUILT ON CHINESE BRANDS

(Step 3: How does it ride?)



狂神



PHOTOS: LIU WEN QIAN
WORDS: MESUM VERMA

We've reached the final chapter of this bike check.

Just to recap, the idea behind this project was simple: build a complete bike using Chinese brands only. Now it's time to answer the real question:

How does it ride on the trail?

The Bike

Steel frame from Kuang Lan, Tianjin.
Wheels and brakes from Ferei, Shenzhen.
Stem and handlebar from Fifty-Fifty, Shenzhen.
Titanium bolts from S-Parts, Xi'an.
Derailleur, cassette and shifter from S-Ride, Foshan.
Dropper post, saddle, pedals and grips from SDG Components, Huntington Beach.
Suspension from X-Fusion, Taichung.
Tires and tubes from Maxxis, Yuanlin.
BB and crankset from Red Yak, China.
Headset from FSA, Taichung.

That's the full setup. In Part II, we already broke down all the components in detail.

When the frame arrived, there was one big question: **size**.

On my previous 27.5" bike, I rode a size M. It felt perfect, not too big, not too small. But looking at the geometry chart from Kuang Lan, it was clear this frame runs big. And with this being my first 29er, I wasn't fully convinced to stick with a medium.

For comparison:
My old bike had a reach of 432 mm. The Kuang Lan in size M comes in at 468 mm: **36 mm longer**.

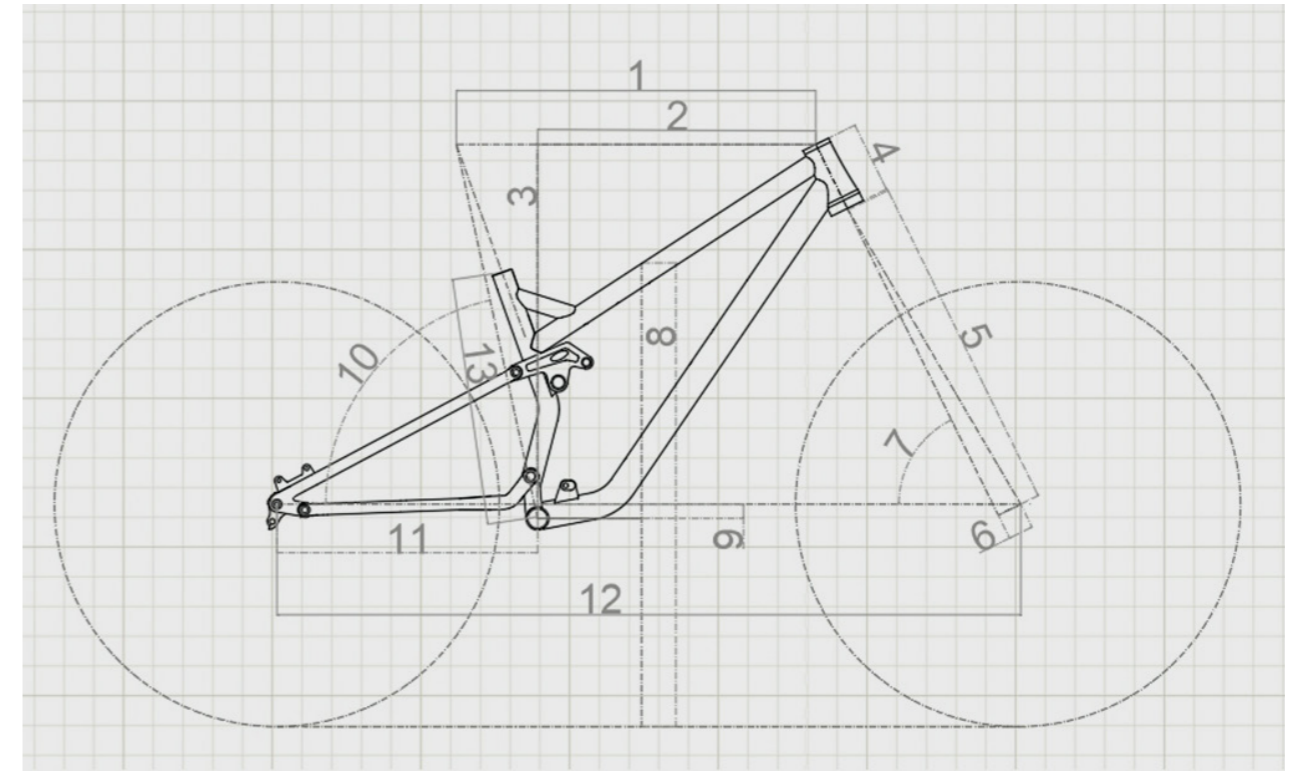
Wheelbase? 1181 mm vs. 1251 mm: **70 mm longer**.

They recommended size M for my height (175 cm), but I didn't want to end up on a tank, especially with bigger wheels in mind. So I went with size S.

Even then, it's still larger than my old bike: 445 mm reach and 1228 mm wheelbase.

And honestly? **I'm very happy with that choice**.

The bike feels playful, even with the 29" wheels. With this setup, the total weight comes in at **17.5 kg**, which is absolutely solid for a steel frame build.



Geometric Dimensions

Sizes	S	M	L
1. Top Tube Length	581.5	604.5	629.7
2. Reach (R-value)	445	468	490
3. Stack Height (S-value)	629	629	638
4. Head Tube Length	120	120	130
5. Fork Length		572	
6. Fork Offset		42	
7. Head tube angle		63.8	
8. Standover Height	785.1	779.7	776.7
9. Bottom bracket drop		24	
10. Seat tube angle	77.7	77.7	77.6
11. Chain stay length		438	
12. Wheelbase	1227.6	1250.6	1277
13. Seat tube length	400	420	440



On the Trail

Let's talk about weight first. Not everything needs to be ultra-light to perform well. We see it like this: lose a few kilos off the rider, and you've already saved more than any component ever could.

On the trail, the bike doesn't feel heavy at all. Climbing is comfortable, with a natural riding position. No need to fight the front wheel on steep sections, it stays planted without forcing your body forward.

I took the bike to my home trail in Switzerland, a proper mix of everything.

The first section has fast berms. Here, I noticed the bike feels bigger than what I was used to. Cornering felt a bit unfamiliar at first, but that's something that comes with time, getting used to 29" wheels.

Once things got rough, the advantage was clear. Roots? The bike just rolls over them. Smooth, stable, no drama.

Next up: jumps. A standard jump with around 3–4 meters to clear, followed by a drop, the bike handled it with ease. The third and fourth sections are fully natural terrain. This is where the bike really came alive. It felt playful, responsive, and easy to control. No feeling of "too big" anymore, just flow.

Final section: berms and jumps again. And at the end of the trail? Just a big smile.

This bike is **fun**.

Overall

This bike doesn't need to hide.

Yes, it's made in China.

Yes, most components are from Chinese brands.

But there's nothing about this bike that feels like a compromise. No weak points where you'd say, "this is why I wouldn't ride it." Quite the opposite.

The design looks clean and modern, not something you immediately label or underestimate. These brands know exactly what they're doing.

Of course, long-term durability is still to be tested. That's the next step, putting real kilometres on the bike and seeing how it holds up over time.

One thing we did notice:

The fork crown contacts the down tube, limiting full handlebar rotation. It's not an issue while riding, but in a crash, it could potentially damage both frame and fork. According to the manufacturer, this shouldn't happen with other forks, but we'll keep an eye on it and look for a solution to protect both areas.

Other than that, there's nothing we would change.

We'll ride it hard throughout the summer, and report back on what survives the abuse of the trail.





From first concept to full trail test, this build proves one thing: it's not just made in China, it's ready to ride anywhere.



Singapore Open Enduro:

No Mountains, No Excuses



PHOTOS: ALLAN TORRES, CS CHONG, STANLEY CHEAH, JEROME TAN, MARK GARCIA

WORDS: MESUM VERMA



No elevation? No problem.

That's pretty much the mindset behind the Singapore Open Enduro, a race that shouldn't work on paper, but absolutely delivers where it counts: tight trails, hard efforts, and a community that keeps showing up year after year.

Because let's be honest, Singapore isn't exactly known for big mountain riding. But instead of trying to imitate alpine enduro, this race leans fully into what it does have: punchy, technical terrain and stages that keep your heart rate pinned from start to finish.

And that's exactly how Wilson Low wants it.

"The goal has always been to build something for the community, something that showcases the trails we actually ride here," he says.

Flat, But Far From Easy

The event proudly carries the title of "the world's flattest MTB enduro", but don't mistake that for an easy day out.

Without long descents

to recover on, riders are constantly on the pedals. It's physical. It's technical. And it opens the door to a different kind of racing dynamic, where cross-country riders line up alongside enduro specialists, and actually have a shot.

It's not about who sends the biggest lines. It's about who can hold it together the longest.

2026: No Warm-Up, Straight to Business

This year, things get even more serious.

The prologue is gone. No easing into race mode, every one of the six stages now counts toward the overall. From Stage 1, it's game on.

And it's not just the elite field feeling the heat. The Kid-duro categories are getting a tougher stage added to their three-stage format, pushing younger riders to step it up early.

More Descending, Same Suffering

With updates around the Bukit Timah Mountain Bike Trail, the 2026 course brings more descending than previous years, but don't expect shuttle vibes.





“It’s still a pedal-heavy race,” Low explains.

That mix is what makes it interesting. You’ll see riders from completely different backgrounds going head-to-head, XC fitness versus enduro handling, and it often comes down to who cracks first.

One Race, Many Flags

If the racing is diverse, so is the field.

Riders from 15 countries (and counting) are already in, reflecting Singapore’s international mix. Locals, expats, weekend warriors, serious racers, it all blends together. And that’s kind of the point.

Out on track, it doesn’t matter where you’re from. Everyone’s just there to ride.

Against the Odds

Putting on a race like this in Singapore isn’t exactly straightforward. Space is limited. Regulations are tight. And plenty of people didn’t expect it to last.

“Most people didn’t think this race would succeed,” Low admits.

But it has, and it keeps growing. Thanks to a solid backing from sponsors, the federation, and a tight-knit MTB community, the Singapore Open Enduro has become a staple on the regional calendar.

Why It Matters

Ask Low to sum it up, and he keeps it simple: “favourite local race.”

Not the biggest. Not the gnarliest. But the one people actually care about.

The kind of race he wanted to ride back in 2016, and the kind riders are still showing up for today.

Because at the end of the day, enduro isn’t just about mountains.

It’s about the effort.





DETAILS

Dates:

Practice: Friday 10 July 2026

Race: Saturday 11 July 2026

Formats:

The Enduro Race will be a 1-day enduro event for racers aged 13 years old and above, where descents are timed and climbs/flat sections are untimed. It consists of 6 race stages – all contested on Saturday 11 July 2026. Timings for the 6 race stages only will be added together to get your overall result. This is NOT a cross-country race, but past riders regard this as an event that can be raced on cross-country/down-country, short travel mountain bikes.

The Kid-duro Race will be a 1-day enduro event for racers between the ages of 7 and 12 years old, where descents are timed and climbs/flat sections are untimed. It consists of 3 race stages – all contested on Saturday 11 July 2026. Timings for the 3 race stages will be added together to get your overall result. This is NOT a cross-country race, but past riders regard this as an event that can be raced on cross-country/down-country, short travel mountain bikes.

Route:

The 2026 edition will take place on trails located in Bukit Timah Nature Reserve and Chestnut Nature Park (all race stages). All routes shall be published on Trailforks at least 2 weeks before the event weekend. The GPS data for all routes is free to access (they will be published about 2 weeks before the event weekend). They can be uploaded to selected GPS devices and companion mobile apps, and can be referred to during practice and racing by riders.

Assembly and Start/Finish Locations:

Friday 10 July 2026: Open practice for all 6 stages for all participants is available on this day at Bukit Timah and Chestnut.

Saturday 11 July 2026: The transfer to the timed runs for the the Kid-durocand the Main Event (Enduro) will be from Bikecraft One cafe at Rifle Range Road (80, Rifle Range Road, Singapore 588386) and bring racers through Bukit Timah and Chestnut.

Regarding the finishes for the three concerned routes: The Kid-duro Race concludes at Dairy Farm Nature Park Open Carpark B (100 Dairy Farm Road, Singapore 679057).

Racers are advised to observe parking regulations if driving to the venues, OR to ride there on their bikes.

Skill Level & Experience:

Enduro racers need to be fit to ride up to 4 hours – for distances exceeding 18km and elevation gain/loss of 400m – per day Kid-duro racers need to be fit to ride up to 2 hours – for distances exceeding 6km and elevation gain/loss of over 150m – per day .The ability to ride all black rated technical trail features in Singapore is highly recommended. Rocky, high-speed, pedal sections... as well as rooty, muddy, tight, and steep singletrack (plus everything in-between) will be part of the race route.

All riders in all categories (regardless of age or gender) will compete on the same course with no exceptions (no shortened versions of course, no alternate go-around lines, no extensions on max. time limits for transfer stages).

SOE is considered an entry-level MTB enduro, and is suitable for first-timers to the enduro format of MTB racing. If you





are unsure of your ability to take part in SOE2026, please contact us for advice.

Technical Support / Food and Drink:

Snacks, water, and sports drinks will be made available at the start/finish staging areas for race day. No mid-course food/drink station per se will be available. Neutral technical support (mechanics, MTB spares, repair services) will be available at the start/finish staging area on race day.

Timing System:

We are using the Sportident Timing System to manage our race results. This is the same highly-accurate, contactless timing system that is also being deployed at EnduroWorld Cup events, Trans Enduro (BC, NZ, Tasmania) events, and Malaysian MEC events, and provides instant results!

Sanctioning and National Series Points:

Singapore Open Enduro 2026 is a Singapore Cycling Federation (SCF) sanctioned event. It is classified as a SCF Class 3 Mountain Bike (MTB) Enduro (END) event, and racers entered in the event are eligible to receive points for the 2026 SCF Series (MTB/Off-Road Series) based on Event overall ranking (1st-10th place).



#ABOUT

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