

Bear scare

Handcyclist was wishing her ride had reverse

By BETH BRAGG
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When a black bear popped out of the woods and onto the bike path in front of racer Sherry Schulz during Wednesday's time trial in the Sadler's Alaska Challenge, Schultz momentarily panicked.

"I think he might've thought I was meals on wheels," she said.

As it turned out, the bear was a nice distraction to what's really been plaguing racers this week in the world's longest timed stage race for wheelchairs and handcycles.

Schulz and others with early start times raced in a downpour Wednesday morning in Girdwood, the halfway point of the eight-stage, seven-day race. The day before, in Hope, they battled strong winds. And the day before that, for stages at Exit Glacier and Seward, they endured a little rain, a little wind and some chilly temperatures.

On Wednesday afternoon they boarded a ferry for Cordova, where they'll race today. It will be the fourth town they've visited so far, with stops in Valdez, Lake Louise and Sutton still to come as the

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”

“
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”

— Handcyclist Sherry Schulz, on seeing a bear

event celebrates its 25th edition with a new format. Replacing the traditional Fairbanks to Anchorage race down the Parks Highway is a race that often

veers off the highway — as it did Wednesday, when the time trial was held on a section of the Gird to Bird paved trail in Girdwood.

"I'm enjoying seeing the new areas of Alaska, but it's been harder just because of the rain," Schulz said.

Not to mention the bears.

Schulz, a 50-year-old schoolteacher from Lakewood, Colo., is a veteran of five previous races, but she'd never before seen a bear as close as she did Wednesday. She figures it stopped on the trail about 100 feet ahead of her.

It was a black bear and it was small, but with no one else around, Schulz was rattled.

"We were told ahead of time that was a bear-active area, so I was looking and I was actually making noise because I was scared and nobody else was around," she said. "He stopped in the middle of the path and I said, 'Go on, bear, go on,' and he did. And I waited awhile because I didn't know if it was a cub and there was a mother.

"I was scared. I could be eaten and you'd nev-

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BILL ROTH / Anchorage Daily News

South African handcyclist Ernst Van Dyk, a former Sadler's Alaska Challenge winner who has also won a world championship and was a road race gold medalist at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games, leaves Girdwood during the start of Wednesday's time trial. With the fourth stage behind them, competitors have completed 66 miles in the 253-mile race.

CHALLENGE: Bear throws scare into Schulz

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er know it. You might see my handcycle on the side of the road."

Schulz said she wasn't sure what she would have done if the bear had acted aggressively toward her.

"You can't really back up in those handcycles, and I didn't think I could outrun it," said Schulz, who was born with spina bifida.

But there was no confrontation, only a slight delay in pelting rain. Schultz thinks she was stopped for 15 to 30 seconds.

That's not much in the big picture — Schulz is last among five women in the overall standings, trailing fifth place by a cumulative 35 minutes.

In Wednesday's time trial, though, she was just 1.5 second out of fifth place. After placing last in the first three stages, Schulz was on pace to finish fourth in Girdwood — until the bear came along.

"My bear-stoppage time should have counted for at least 15 or 20 seconds," she said with a laugh.

The leaders all held onto their advantages Wednesday.

Elmar Sternath of Germa-

ny, Ernst Van Dyk of South Africa, Saul Mendoza of Mexico and Monique Van der Vorst of The Netherlands all won their divisions in the time trial to stay atop the overall standings.

Sternath, racing in the longseat handcycle division, finished in 32 minutes, 11 seconds for the fastest time of the day. He leads Manfred Putz of Austria in the overall standings by 10 minutes.

Van Dyk clocked 32:35.8 in a kneeseat handcycle to put a little more distance between himself and Norbert Mosandl in the overall standings. Van Dyk led the German by 12 seconds coming into the time trial, but he beat Mosandl by nearly 50 seconds Wednesday to gain a lead of almost a minute in the overall standings.

Mendoza set the wheelchair pace in 52:20.5 to extend his overall lead to almost two minutes over Paul Nunnari of Austria.

And in a battle between the gold and silver medalists from last year's road race in the Beijing Paralympics, silver medalist Monique Van der Vorst of The Netherlands is getting a bit of revenge on gold medalist Andrea Eskau of

Germany. Van der Vorst won the time trial in 38:44.2 — almost three minutes ahead of Eskau — and owns nearly a 15-minute overall lead heading into today's Tour of Cordova, a 36-mile road race.

The race ends Sunday with a road race from Sutton to Hatcher Pass that ends at Independence Mine.

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Sadler's Alaska Challenge

Wednesday's results Girdwood time trial (11.8 miles)

Men's wheelchair — 1) Saul Mendoza 52:20.5; 2) Paul Nunnari 54:26; 3) James Lilly 1:17:13.2.

Women's handcycle — 1) Monique Van der Vorst 38:44.2; 2) Andrea Eskau 41:31.5; 3) Melissa Stockwell 52:36.4; 4) Susan Katz 1:00:09; 5) Sherry Schulz 1:00:10.6.

Men's handcycle (longseat) — 1) Elmar Sternath 32:11.5; 2) Manfred Putz 35:08.3; 3) Heinz Frei 36:23.9; 4) Stefan Baumann 37:01.2; 5) Matt Urdike 37:10.5; 6) Seth Arseneau 40:01.0; 7) Klaus Dolleschal 40:40.9; 8) Drew Willis 41:42.6; 9) Rafael Ibarra 43:58.4; 10) Josh Sharpe 44:14.2; 11) Brant Schalk 44:55.7; 12) Christian Peter 45:57.5; 13) Bill Schwarz 47:54; 14) Scott Davidson 48:01.5; 15) Ed Jones 48:14.6; 16) Harold Warner 49:10; 17) Bill Lasher 50:12.4; 18) Kevin Jackson 52:47.7; 19) Joseph Dowling 53:11.7; 20) Michael O'Neill 54:14.3; 21) Rick Gilliland 58:15.4; 22) Bostick Leon 58:39.4; 23) Larry Coutermarsh 1:00:40.3.

Men's handcycle (kneeseat) — 1) Ernst Van Dyk 32:35.8; 2) Norbert Mosandl 33:23.3; 3) Chris Peterson 34:08.2; 4) Krig Schabert 37:13.8; 5) Scott McNeice 37:47.4.

Overall standings through 4 of 8 stages

Men's Wheelchair — 1) Mendoza 5:22:07.9; 2) Nunnari 5:47:14.1; 3) Lilly 7:14:23.1.

Women's handcycle — 1) Van der Vorst 4:25:11.4; 2) Eskau 4:39:50.7; 3) Katz 5:33:16.8; 4) Stockwell 5:39:00.4; 5) Schulz 6:15:18.8.

Men's handcycle (longseat) — 1) Sternath 3:44:58.1; 2) Putz 3:54:43.3; 3) Frei 3:57:05.2; 4) Baumann 4:01:08.3; 5) Urdike 4:05:22.0; 6) Dolleschal 4:18:47.8; 7) Arseneau 4:22:59.2; 8) Willis 4:31:01.5; 9) Sharpe 4:

41:49.6; 10) Ibarra 4:47:00.3; 11) Schalk 4:54:46.2; 12) Jones 4:57:59.3; 13) Peter 4:58:47.4; 14) Davidson 4:59:50.4; 15) Warner 5:11:42.5; 16) Dowling 5:25:20.2; 17) Gilliland 5:30:10.3; 18) Lasher 5:33:31.8; 19) Schwarz 5:33:59.7; 20) Jackson 5:37:47.9; 21) O'Neill 6:10:33.9; 22) Bostick 6:12:39.3; 23) Coutermarsh 6:19:29.6.

Men's handcycle (kneeseat) — 1) Van Dyk 3:57:39.1; 2) Mosandl 3:58:37.9; 3) Peterson 3:59:24.3; 4) Schabert 4:10:42.8; 5) McNeice 4:20:45.1.

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