



PEDAL POWER: The British National Mountain Bike Cross-Country Championships at Cathkin Braes in Glasgow have been hailed a great success ahead of next year's Games. Picture: Phil Rider/Lighthouse Images

# Double gold triumph on home soil in Commonwealth dress rehearsal



## SUSAN SWARBRICK

AS far as dress rehearsals go one can only hope it may prove auspicious as Scotland took double gold on the mountain bike course that will play host to the 2014 Commonwealth Games next summer.

Inverness-based Lee Craigie (Cannondale Racing UK) and Peebles rider Grant Ferguson (Superior Brentjens MTB Racing Team) claimed victory at the 2013 British National Mountain Bike Cross-Country Championships in Glasgow yesterday.

Ferguson became the only Scottish man to win the senior event since it began in 1989, while Craigie is the first woman since compatriot Caroline Alexander in 2002 to hold the title.

Racing over a 5.5km circuit, created by world-renowned mountain bike course designer Phil Saxena, the men competed over seven

laps and the women six. Back in May, the third round of the 2013 SXC Scottish Cross-Country Race was in mud-bath conditions to rival Glastonbury, but the trails are currently hard baked courtesy of the heatwave.

In the early laps riders were visible only through a cloud of dust, resembling a herd of thundering wildebeest as they passed the cheering masses.

Craigie did not hang about, getting off to a blistering start with only former world downhill champion Tracy Moseley (Malvern Cycle Sport) able to hold her wheel.

As the laps built so too did Craigie's lead, distancing herself from Moseley and Jane Nuessli (Fischer-BMC) who took up the chase in second place.

By the halfway stage she was ahead by 90 seconds. Determination etched on her face, legs pumping up the climbs and blonde plaits flying on the downhill sections, Craigie powered her way to victory. Nuessli finished second, more than two minutes down, with Moseley in third.

Glasgow-born Craigie, 34, has been something of a quiet, unsung hero in mountain biking circles. She spent much of early 2012 traversing the trails of South Africa on a points-gathering mission for British Cycling

to help cement team-mate Annie Last's place in the Olympic Games.

In recent weeks, the rider has spoken of her desire to win the national champion's jersey in her home town and as she crossed the line Craigie said her overriding emotion was one of relief. "I don't think I have ever felt so nervous before a race," she said. "It's ridiculous. I felt like it was my first race ever in the fun category back in 2002."

"It meant so much to come out on this course in front of a home crowd. I really wanted to win today. I'm just so relieved nothing went wrong. I knew on paper I could do it but you never know what could happen out there."

"The nerves didn't ease any as the race went on," she added. "Going into the final lap I dropped all my gears and was stuck for a few moments trying to get them back on. At another point I thought I'd got a flat. My heart was in my mouth every time I took a bad line, felt a tyre go or my gears slip."

"The fact it's British nationals is amazing, but that it's here at Cathkin Braes and on the 2014 Commonwealth Games course is a huge thing. It feels pretty emotional to win here."

Ferguson was in equally tenacious

mood, the 19-year-old holding five-time British national champion Oli Beckingsale (Endura MTB Racing) at bay to win the senior men's title.

It was a fierce battle to the finish with Ferguson finally surging forward on the final lap to win by 27 seconds. Beckingsale came second with David Fletcher (Orange Monkey Pro Team) third.

"It was a tough ride out there," said Ferguson. "It was pretty windy and Oli was flying, he was battering me on all the climbs. But I felt good. It's been a big target for a few months now so I'm pleased to get it right."

"It will be great to wear the national champion's jersey for the next year. I've not had stripes since I was a youth, so it's been a wee while since I last got to rock them. I'm looking forward to that."

His Superior Brentjens team-mate and fellow Scot Kenta Gallagher fared less well, caught up first in a crash and then plagued by a series of mechanical problems.

"It was just bad luck," said a philosophical Gallagher. "The first couple of laps were going well but then Rab [Wardell] had a little crash in front of me. I had to chase back on to the group and had only just managed

that when I clipped my rear mech with a stone.

"It sent all the gears haywire. I had to stop in the pits three times and by that point my head was gone. In the end, I simply wanted to get round. I don't like not finishing, so I was determined."

Elsewhere among the Scottish contingent, Gareth Montgomerie (GT Muc-Off Racing) finished fifth and Wardell (Trek UK), despite a crash, in 11th.

There was success for Scotland in the youth categories, too. Calum Macgowan (Peebles CC/Alpine Bikes) pipped fellow Scot Harry Johnston (Dales Cycles Racing/Team Scotland) in a tightly contested sprint finish to take the youth male title. Erika Allen (Team Thomsons Cycles) won the youth female title ahead of Hannah English (Guernsey Velo Club).

Gregor Grant (Moray Firth CC) and John Shirley (West Highland Wheelers) took victory in their respective grand and super veteran categories.

Peebles rider Isla Short (WXC World Racing) was a silver medallist in the junior women's race, with Scots Iain Paton (Ben Wyvis CC) and Stuart Wilcox (Team Scott UK) taking second and third in the junior men's category.