

## A race for fifth place in Costa Rica

A hot shot Colombian team wiped out all opposition in the Tour of Costa Rica, December 25 through January 2, taking the first four individual places and the team prize. Other contenders were left to vie for fifth place, which went to U.S. rider Mark Pringle.

Forty cyclists from several nations participated in the 1168 kilometer event, comprised of eight stages and a rest day. Although neither the Mexicans nor the Venezuelans were present (reportedly they do not like to meet the Colombians in head-to-head combat) four-man squads from Guatemala, Honduras, and Taiwan supplemented the Costa Rican entrants.

It was the second year the U.S. had ridden the event. In 1975 the Colombians also won the top four, while George Mount had been fifth, and the team second overall. This year the squad was again in second until the retirement of two of its members lost them any chance of a team placing.

The U.S. team consisted of Steve Jennings (Turin), Tom Lehrecke (North Jersey-Paris Sport), Tom Prehn (NCVC-Georgetown), and Mark Pringle (Velocipede-Sekai). Coach was Oliver Martin and mechanic Bill Woodul.

In the first stage, 87 kilometers over an up and down circuit, both Jennings and Pringle flattened and were forced to chase for the last 60 kilometers. Lehrecke was fourth and Prehn finished in the same group. Colombians won this and every succeeding stage.

In the 168 km second stage Pringle finished alone between the first and second groups, in sixth place, only one minute down. Lehrecke was eighth, Prehn tenth, and Jennings thirteenth.

Pringle and Prehn paired up to take seventh and eighth places on the next 129 km stage, with Lehrecke eleventh. But it was the beginning of the end for Jennings. Fourteen minutes down on this stage, he dropped out the next day because of sickness.

"A killer," coach Martin calls the fourth stage, 133 kilometers including a 90 kilometer climb from 3300 feet to almost 11,000. With Colombians netting first through fourth, Pringle finished fifth, eight minutes down. Prehn (7th) and Lehrecke finished in the second group.

Best stage for the U.S. was the fifth, also the flattest — 120 km with only a 900 foot climb. Tom Lehrecke got away with a Costa Rican who had raced in France. They were caught by a group including Mark Pringle and Lehrecke was dropped in the final kilometers to finish fifth. A Colombian got away alone for the win, but Pringle outsprinted the others in his group to take second place, the best individual stage placing for the U.S. during the Tour. The team was now in second overall.

The sixth stage was a return over the same course as the fourth. The Colombians rode their usual four-man team time trial for the top places, while Pringle and a Guatemalan rode together in pursuit. The North American dropped the Central American with about 10 km to go and finished alone in fifth. Prehn and Lehrecke, in the next group, attacked with 18 to go and gained five minutes on their group to place seventh and eighth.

The seventh stage was an eventful one. With Pringle sitting on the wheel of the man just up in general classification from Prehn, Prehn and Lehrecke attacked in an attempt to move up in the standings. Lehrecke crashed and loosened a tooth but got up and continued, only to crash again on a sharp right hand turn on a bumpy road. His elbow and hip severely lacerated and unable to walk, he was taken to the hospital overnight and couldn't complete the race.

Meanwhile Prehn gained twelve minutes and moved up in the standings but there were now not enough riders left on the team to count towards an overall placing and their secure hold on second place went for nothing.

In the final 130 km stage Pringle was again fifth and Prehn ninth. The pair had sewn up fifth and sixth place overall, next after the Colombians.

The loss of Lehrecke was unfortunate for the team. Blind in one eye and a very big rider for a climber's event, he had struggled up the hills on his big chain ring with a 15 tooth cog in the back. Martin has recommended he do some fixed gear work when he gets home. "Back to basics, learn to pedal," says the Italian-trained coach.

Although the foursome had trained in Northern California under the direction of George Mount before the event, it was

tough to be in shape in late December and Martin felt the team lacked "climbing personnel." Pringle was able to match the individual Colombians but when they teamed up and attacked him repeatedly, there was little he could do.

"We were happy," says Martin of the good performances of his men, but adds that they felt frustrated at being "constantly so far out of it. We didn't have any control."

With expenses paid by the Costa Ricans, the trip cost the U.S.C.F \$300. Pringle's fifth prize was \$20, but this was up from \$18 last year! "Inflation," says Martin.

### 12th VUELTA CYCLISTA A COSTA RICA. DEC. 25-JAN. 2 — 1168 km

1. Norberto Caseres, Col., 29:56:23
2. Plinio Casas, Col., 30:01:25
3. Arturo Matamoros, Col., 30:02:53
4. Jose Lopez, Col., 30:09:07
5. Mark Pringle, U.S.A., 31:15:26
6. Tom Prehn, U.S.A., 31:30:49
7. Carlos Alvarado, Costa Rica, 31:37:50
8. Sigifredo Chavez, C.R., 31:50:52
9. Jose Manuel Soto, C.R., 31:53:56
10. Jose Badilla, C.R., 32:00:22

### TEAM STANDINGS

1. Colombia, 89:53:17
2. Costa Rica — Recope, 95:19:09

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