

Gaelforce West 2014 Race Report

As predicted the 2014 Gaelforce West race proved to be a hard fought one with plenty of top class racing in evidence throughout.

In the men's race the first run was led out at a fairly frantic pace by Kieron Kelly again this year but unlike in 2013 when he faded to finish more than an hour behind the leaders he lasted much better this year. 2014 GFN winner Shaun Stewart and top marathon runner Barry Minnock were alongside as this trio hit the water for the kayak section close together.

One of the strong pre-race favourites Dessie Duffy, who was 3rd overall here last year, was in 5th just behind Brian Malone in 4th. These were significantly ahead of a group including Barry Cronin, Peter Cromie, Eanna Cunnane Jerry O Sullivan and Lonan O Farrell 10th with a gap back to multiple winner Peter O Farrell in 15th.

With only some of the leaders being assigned single boats and others being able to avail of a time out the kayak stage confusingly took on more significance than other years as Eanna Cunnane and Kieron Cosgrove made some gains and others like Kelly, Minnock and O Sullivan significant losses to rivals.

After the short run up to the bike transition at Delphi the overall order was largely unchanged with Stewart, Kelly and Minnock now closely chased by Duffy whilst the pack closed up in anticipation of a "survive together is best" policy on the bike leg knowing that Duffy's wheel would not be caught by most today unlike last year where he was tracked by several others including the two rivals who were to go on and beat him.

Duffy as expected caught and passed the 3 leaders and only Stewart could keep pace temporarily but once Duffy had exerted his biking strength he stretched out a decent lead over the chasers who were now becoming fragmented with Kelly 2nd, ahead of Stewart and then Minnock arriving at the base of Croagh Patrick.

Behind these the chase group included Peter O Farrell, O Sullivan, Cromie, Cronin and Paul Tierney whilst Kieran Cosgrove, who was probably the strongest biker in the group, suffered badly with cramp and as a result was not the driving force in the group that many had hoped for having to drop back from the group mid stage.

Arriving at the mountain base in 5th was O Farrell and Cromie 6th with a small gap now to O Sullivan and then Cronin and Tierney next in.

On the mountain climb Duffy showed his strength posting the 2nd fastest climb of the day 29" down on O Sullivan who was a min faster than O Farrell who in turn was a min ahead of Cromie.

Duffy showed decent if unspectacular descending speed as he consolidated his lead over O Farrell and O Sullivan who came together in the battle for 2nd on the descent as Kelly, Stewart and Minnock all started to slip down the field.

Cromie had caught Kelly by the start of the bike leg and then a gap back to the improving Garrett Bracken and Stewart with Lonan O Farrell next thanks to the fastest mountain descent of the day.

The final bike leg and extended run back to Westport was hard fought for all but relatively unspectacular with no significant mechanical or other mishaps.

Duffy took his first Series win impressively in a time of 3h 33' 34" almost 7 min clear of 4 time winner O Farrell with O Sullivan having a good race to be a close up 3rd.

Cromie came home a further 3 mins back in 4th to take the vet's title ahead of fellow vets Kelly in 5th and Bracken in 6th

In the ladies race there was close battle anticipated between multiple GFW winner Emma Donlon who was 2nd here in 2013 and Moire O Sullivan who was a close 2nd to Donlon in Dingle before taking a clear win at GFN at end of June.

This pair were together for the opening few km of the first run but Donlon then put on the pressure with a strong run to reach the kayaks in 61' with O Sullivan some 5' behind just ahead of Paula Prendergast and then a gap to Shelia Regan and Alwyn Thornton.

This order remained the same on the kayak stage as all the leading ladies took doubles and on arrival at the Delphi bike transition with Donlon now 8' clear of O Sullivan who in turn had a gap of over 3' to Prendergast with Regan and Thornton next best.

The leading pair stretched clear of their rivals on the bike leg to the base of Croagh Patrick with Donlon almost 9' clear of O Sullivan not with Prendergast some 11' further back now ahead of Regan with Orla Mc Evoy moving through the field into 5th with the day's 3rd fastest ladies bike split.

On the mountain the drama was about to unfold as Donlon's form took a significant dive and O Sullivan had a great climb to pass her rival at the summit. This pair were now 16' clear of Prendergast with Mc Evoy next and Sue Rust moving up to 5th thanks to the days second fastest ladies ascent with Regan in 6th.

The descent was as significant as the ascent in deciding the race as O Sullivan built a 6' gap over Donlon with Prendergast 3rd ahead of Mc Evoy, Lisa Howley and Regan.

O Sullivan kept it steady on the final leg to the Westport house finish and took a great win in a time of 4h 22' 23" some 5' clear of Donlon with Prendergast a further 27' back in 3rd.

Grace Gannon set the day's 4th fastest time from a wave 3 start with Mc Evoy 5th and Lisa Howley taking the vets title in 6th.

