

RACE

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“I just love small town America,” he said. “It’s amazing the atmosphere when small town America puts on an event. Word of your race has spread all through the racing world and that’s why I’m here.”

The youngest competitor in the 200-mile challenge, 20-year-old Alea Robinson, was running her first ECX and finished third in the grueling race. Robinson, who has run the junior Iditarod (148-158 miles) twice, also had the benefit of running a team partly made up of Iditarod veterans owned by the 2015 Iditarod fourth-place finisher, Jesse Royer of Darby, Mont. She finished the race with 11 of her 12 dogs, leaving one behind at the 100-mile check in.

Royer, who has run the Iditarod 13 times and was the highest placing female racer in the Iditarod for four years, came in behind her young friend by just over an hour with her full complement of 12 dogs.

Royer’s dogs are famous, with her now-retired lead dog “Kuling” winning the “2009 Iditarod Golden Harness Award”



Kathleen Ellyn/Chieftain

The record keepers check off requirements as a musher goes through his bag at the first Ollokot checkpoint, 50 miles into the 200-mile race.

and going on to run nine more Iditarods before his retirement at age 12.

The 200-mile finishing results from there: Washingtonian and 2005 Iditarod racer Mark Stamm; returning ECX racer Josi Thyr of Idaho; 2015 Iditarod competitor Jason Campeau of Alberta, Canada, with wife Jennifer just a few seconds behind in her first attempt at a 200-mile race; and Idahoan Bryce Mumford finishing the pack. 2010 Iditarod

veteran Scott White of Washington got sick 50 miles into the race and was forced to scratch.

The wildlife highlight of the race was Josie Thyr’s sighting of a cougar that stepped onto the road in front of her in the Twin Lakes area.

“I just yelled at him and he moved off,” she said. “But I was looking over my shoulder for a while after that.”

Two women finished the 100-mile challenge, with 52-year-old Idahoan Laurie Warren taking the win with a run of 19 hours and 25 minutes.

“ECX is still my favorite race,” Warren said. “Nobody compares with you guys.”

Californian April Cox, 45, came in second with a time of 28 hours and one minute.

“I never thought I’d finish,” Cox said. “I always thought

getting to Ollokot was the hard part. Getting home is the hard part.”

Hugo Antonucci, the only man in the 100-mile race, scratched after his dogs took a wrong turn on the final leg and he determined they didn’t have enough gas in the tank to back-track and plow through 8-9 inches of drifting snow toward the finish.

“My leaders were just too tired,” Antonucci said.

And in one of the most exciting races of the event, 52-year-old Jane Delvin of Bend ran the 62-mile, two-day pot race with a time of just 6 hours and 33 minutes, with 77-year-old Laura Crocker hot on her trail and less than an hour behind with a time of 7 hours and 15 minutes.

In explaining her great

time, Devlin laughed and said, “I was being chased by a smokin’ senior.”

That senior, Crocker, is perhaps best remembered as the woman who ran the 200-mile race in her early 70s. She scratched in that one, just 11 miles from the finish, when her dogs mistook Salt Creek Summit for the end of the race and decided they were done.

This time she made the finish line, coming in with no brakes.

“Coming down that chute into Fergi, if I had an angel on my shoulder it would have been Terry Hinesley saying ‘You can do it! You can do it!’”

Carleen Brehmer of Green Bay, Wis., who was running a team of Zuska Siberians provided by Gary and Susan Paraga of Joseph, came in third with a time of 9 hours and 59 minutes. Brehmer, a sprint racer, had never raced farther than 6 miles before.

Aaron Peck won the coveted “Best Kept Team” award for the 200-mile race, and Laurie Warren won it for the 100-mile race.

The veterinarian team votes for the winner of this award based on a lot of factors, said lead veterinarian Dr. Jim Leach. He described observing mushers caring for their dogs before themselves, “when they’re half-asleep and their drawn and tired ... it’s a big job.”

Veterinarians also took note of those who massaged sore joints and helped their dogs limber up and get ready to go; musher’s wisdom in knowing when to change pace and have adequate rest stops; and “the overall attitude while they’re doing all this hard work.”

Leach said it was particularly difficult to pick a winner

at ECX because the quality of mushers was so high, but that the vote had been unanimous.

In accepting his award, Peck noted that things seemed to have come full circle. He recalled that when he began as a handler in Alaska, working with Iditarod champion Martin Buser, Dr. Leach was Buser’s veterinarian of choice.

“My dog care is founded on what I learned back there,” Peck said.

“Volunteer of the Year Awards” went to the Ollokot Camp Directors Joann Frioli and Adam Wing.

The “Terry Hinesley ECX Award,” named for the former race marshal, went to Glenn McDonald for his many years of service on the trail crew. A clearly-moved McDonald said he was “probably a closet musher — but unfortunately the clock makes that unfeasible.” As part of his award he was given an honorary No. 1 musher’s bib.

The “Lead Dog Award” for innovation in moving the ECX organization forward went to volunteer Michael Moore, whose computer design skills, among other talents, were considered key in modernizing the presentation of the race.

The “Sportsmanship Award” went to Mark Stamm, whose home burned this year in the fires in Washington. Stamm, who was very quiet and closed in when he first began coming to ECX, has opened up and become a crowd and musher favorite over the years. He was honored this year for his sportsmanship and his ability to overcome hardship.

“A lot of good things have happened to me since my house burned down,” Stamm quipped.

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