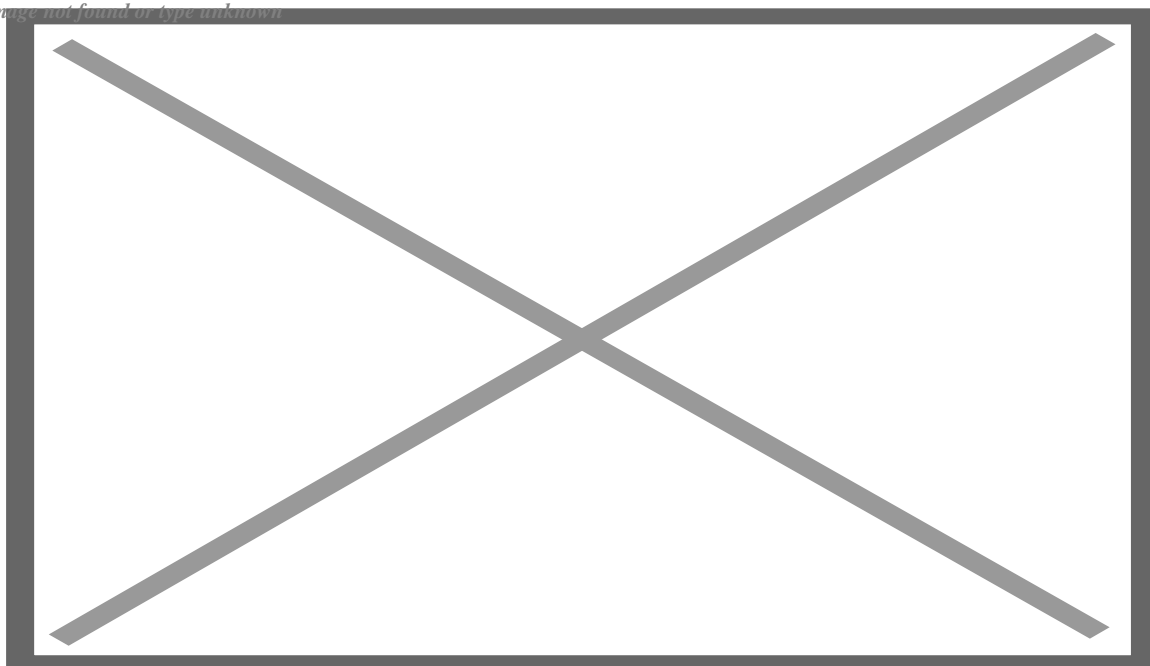


# *Record number of participants in Mountain Bike Challenger*

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Sancti Spíritus (JIT) - The II Escambray Mountain Bike Challenger 2023 starts this Thursday with a record number of participants, as the number of participants reached 67.

In the last edition 62 "all-rounders" competed, including eight women.

This time there are seven women, among them the defending champion, Ludisnely Fleita, a member of the national team that is preparing for the Central American and Caribbean Games of San Salvador 2023.

Most of the contestants arrived this Wednesday at the Los Laureles motel, an attractive facility where the technical meeting took place.

Jorge Rojas, competitor and head of the organizing committee, told JIT the joy of all "for the response of the athletes, many of them returning, but also others who have wanted to live this experience, even prepared to challenge the podium winners".

"This event needs a measured logistics and it is difficult for everything to go as we want, much more being self-financed by athletes and companions, but we strive and impose ourselves to the difficulties," he said.

He reiterated the fundamental support of Inder, especially its provincial cycling commission, the companies Gaviota, Isla Azul, camping and school transport, as well as the National Revolutionary Police and the SIUM.

"Excyclists who live in other provinces also arrived and support us as commissaries, drivers or in any task. We appreciate that, as well as the role of the press, because it stimulates the competitors and the people know what is being done to keep our sport alive".

Regarding tributes, this year -thanks to the cooperation of friends- more cyclists will receive awards in the categories called, namely elite (male); ladies; master A (up to 39 years of age), B (up to 49), C (from 50 onwards) and youths.

Regarding the latter, from Ciego de Avila, his native land, the runner-up in the Challenger 2022, Randol Izquierdo, who was later crowned in the national championship of this modality, held precisely in the province of Yayabo, arrived pedaling to Los Laureles.

"I come better prepared and to fight for the top of the podium, although I have very good rivals, also from the Cuban mountain bike team," said the lanky young man, who is equally passionate about road races, in which he has had positive results.

"It is necessary to train and sacrifice to obtain triumphs, but it is also necessary to compete, to compete with others of equal or higher level", he said.

Another who arrived with the group from Havana was the Artemisian Alexander Casa, Cuban titleholder of the group of "50-year-olds" and runner-up in the Challenger 2022. However, he came to defend the crown the capital's Jorge Manuel Blanco and to improve the third place Lazaro Forte, his provincial teammate.

"The three of us have the same goal, to win. It will be a fraternal, but hard-fought fight in our category," said Chanty, as the only one who races on the island with mountain bike tires of maximum thickness (27.5x4.5 inches) is affectionately called.

He explained that "they were created for sand and snow, once I tested and reached second place, then I won. In the future I always compete with this type of bike and it has given me good results, the wheels are not as heavy as they look".

This Thursday, as updated in the congress, the first stage will be from the capital of Espiritu to the campground Planta Cantu at a distance of 40 kilometers.

The next day will be 35 km, starting at that facility and ending at the La Hormiga campground.

Saturday will be the most rigorous section in terms of distance (65 km) and obstacles, mainly in the last part when they have to "climb" the embankment that leads to the top of Topes de Collantes.

The conclusion is scheduled for Sunday 22, relatively short, but with technical demands for the descent of 800 meters through the Valle de los Ingenios and the 30 km, the last two on the sands of Ancon beach.

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