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The Trials of a Race Director

By Rob Howard

The day prior to the race start ARWC2009 is scattered around the township of Cascais, with most of the teams at the Villa Bicuda, where they have spacious apartments, and at the Hotel Eden, which is on the main road to Lisbon. There are on opposite sides of town, and other teams are in the Youth Hostel or local accommodation, while registration continued in a location near the beach. Teams have spent the day shopping for last minute supplies or testing out their bikes and skates, and tonight everyone will come together for the race briefing at the Hotel Eden.

This takes place at 18.00 and will be the biggest ever gathering of teams and nationalities for a World Championship race, so there are sure to be lots of different points of view and as the race format here is so unusual there are sure to be a lot of questions. It could go on for a while ...

The man giving much of the briefing and answering most of the questions is Race Director Alexandre Guedes da Silva and in the course of the day I've met him a couple of times. He is still smiling, but it's clear he has a difficult time in the lead up to the race, particularly dealing with local bureaucrats and officials.

Yesterday he spent most of the day finally securing the required permits from the National Parks! "We have been talking to them for months and months," he said, "it wasn't necessary to issue the permit the day before the race!" One consequence of this was changing all the maps ... and in total there are 7000 maps to be printed! (Each team will be issued 59 maps tonight and the only one they won't get is that for tomorrow's first stage.)

He also spent 3 hours with customs getting the SPOT trackers released and collected and today had to make two trips to Lisbon (an hour round trip at least), to conclude car hire agreements. "I tried to send some assistants," he said, "but they will only deal with me."

While I was waiting with him at another car hire centre in Cascais he told me which teams he thinks will do well. It was conversation triggered by his comment that he didn't expect Nike/Beaver Creek to be in the top 5. "I think Nicholas Mulder's South African team will do very well," he said, "they really know and study this race. Also Petri Forsman is here to win. He won 2 years ago and is such a good tactician and navigator." He clearly gives a lot of importance to having experience of Portugal XPD from past races and added, "This is a race which favours the clever, thinking racers and teams, not just the strong. How the teams cope with the Bonus CP's will be so critical and though they may not be a long distance off the expected route, they will take a lot of time and effort to reach!"

The teams already know they will have an opening prologue stage in Cascais tomorrow, before being bussed into central Portugal to restart on Monday morning, after which the race will be continuous. Tonight they will get the full details of this huge, and potentially puzzling, course.



Race Report

