

The Race | The Route

Prologue

Date: 21 March 2009
Start/Finish: Cape Town
Distance: 19km
Climbing: 650m
Cut-off time: 2.5 hours

Table Mountain hosts the 2009 Absa Cape Epic Prologue. In a race against the clock, riders traverse its steep and rocky slopes, hoping for a good seeding position at the start in Gordon's Bay. From the edge of the leafy city bowl suburbs, riders enter the National Reserve and immediately begin climbing past the water reservoir. Once the vistas over the City and Table Bay unfold, riders face a steep and in places loose descent towards Deer Park – to then turn up again heading to Dead Man's Tree on Tafelberg Road. It's a steep switchback climb averaging 15% – and it is as fierce as the wildlife you might encounter on the way up. Don't be surprised to spot a lazy Puff Adder or an angry Cape Cobra as the day warms. The section on Tafelberg Road towards the Blockhouse allows riders to spin their legs before plunging down a fast and tricky dirt road (beware of the speed bumps!) towards the infamous triple towers. Just as riders start enjoying the thrill of downhill, two more steep climbs bring them to a near stand-still, before coming out again at Deer Park for a short singletrack section and the final push to the finish. The distance of the prologue might sound short – but rest assured – there is nothing flat on this mountain!

'Be sure to make use of the official practice sessions, and watch out for the fast, gravelly bends on the descents.' Dr Evil

No water points

Stage 1

Date: 22 March 2009
Start/Finish: Gordon's Bay to Villiersdorp
Distance: 112km
Climbing: 2769m
Cut-off time: 17:00

Gordon's Bay, the start venue for the 2009 race-proper, is a small, idyllic seaside town on the eastern edge of False Bay. History shows that Stage 1 has never been easy at the Absa Cape Epic and the 2009 edition is no exception. Almost immediately after the gun goes, riders begin climbing, and the steep ascent to Steenbras Dam will stretch out the field. The cyclists then cross under the N2 and into the Grabouw plantations towards Nuweberg. Careful riding will be needed on the 200m downhill singletrack section, as well as the 500m technical piece that follows – a taste of what lies ahead in the week. Still to come is a familiar highlight of the Absa Cape Epic – Groenlandberg! The 5km climb starts off at about 8%. The surface is loose and the edges rutted, which makes it difficult to maintain momentum, but the gradient eases up near the top. Take care on the occasionally treacherous downhill. Halfway along the flat 10km gravel section that follows, there's a MTN sprint hot spot, but it will be prudent to save something for the last 15km – with several sharp rises on farm roads and dual track, it could take a while to get to Villiersdorp, where riders will settle in for two nights.

'This will be the longest day in the saddle for the riders – a hard first day, as always. Conservative riding is best. Don't beat yourself up here.' Dr Evil

Water point 1: 30km
Water point 2: 57km
Water point 3: 85km



Stage 2

Date: 23 March 2009
Start/Finish: Villiersdorp
Distance: 110km
Climbing: 1527m
Cut-off time: 17:00

Graceful oak trees and tranquil fruit orchards suggest something more relaxed than the start towards Elandsloof, which is likely to be furiously fast. Heading up to Worcester, the road hugs the foothills of the mountains for 12km, darting in and out of the vineyards. Sixteen degree slopes might be perfect for crafting fine wine, but this kind of climbing requires expert balance and poise to avoid having to climb off and walk, and makes for tired legs this early in the stage. With a clear view of Villiersdorp, the "Pearl of the Overberg", riders make their way towards Worcester past the Brandvlei Cellar before heading back towards Robertson. There are several more steep climbs in the loop that circumnavigates the valley, and one after the other, riders will be searching for their granny gears as they winch their way up. A trip through a private game farm will offer some distraction from the fatigue as kudu, eland, gemsbok, springbok and ostrich spectate the cycling spectators! One of the main obstacles of the day is a 3km, technical 8% climb, where riders unfortunately can't just put head down and grind. They have to pick the best lines through the sharp rocks. Ruts and loose shale are to be found on every Karoo ride, and these challenges could end a distracted rider's whole race in an instant.

'Save something for the 2km climb near the end. It goes up to a telecommunications mast before the very tricky descent towards home.' Dr Evil

Water point 1: 30km
Water point 2: 52km
Water point 3: 85km



Stage 3

Date: 24 March 2009

Start/Finish: Villiersdorp to Greyton

Distance: 73km

Climbing: 1976m

Cut-off time: 15:00

After two nights in Villiersdorp, riders head out to Greyton. The first obstacle on their way is the track towards Kaaimansgat, where they climb 750m in the first 13km. Here, a concrete section approaches an 18% gradient. The water canal lies at the 20km mark and from here the riders need to steel their resolve for a long ascent up a rugged 4x4 trail. The altitude reading will go from 400m to 1000m in 5km, and the riders will feel as if they are expected to ride straight up a wall. A single 3km stretch of portage here will take the best part of 45 minutes to complete, but those taking the time to look around will be rewarded with a 180-degree mountain vista to help lighten the load. This takes riders to the top of Boskloof, where it might be prudent to rest a while, as erosion has not been kind to the roads on the way down. Greyton, another sleepy town in the Overberg, nestles in the beautiful Riviersonderend mountains, but first the riders have to experience the three fun but tough pieces of singletrack – 6km in all – along the last section of the route.

'Wear your softest mountain bike shoes for walking the hike-a-bike section – you have to carry your bike, as pushing is not possible.' Dr Evil

Water point 1: 13km

Water point 2: 37km

Water point 3: 64km



Stage 4

Date: 25 March 2009

Start/Finish: Greyton

Distance: 114km

Climbing: 2202m

Cut-off time: 17:00

Stage 4 begins on the open roads with a steady climb, followed by a tricky section on fast, rocky tracks, testing the reactions early in the morning. After crossing the causeway, a winding trip up and over the hills along farm roads and 4x4 tracks takes the field back towards Greyton. But they're not home yet; the last 15km sees a few more sections that test the technical skills of the riders on the climbs as well as the descents. Most of the terrain is rideable but with some 20% slopes, the heart may be willing while the legs scream blue murder. This devastating series of hills will deliver a knockout combination to those lacking in base conditioning. A small reward comes at the end though, as there is some lovely singletrack and a walk across the riverbed just outside town. Today, riders will have earned their rest in Greyton.

'This is the easiest day except for stage 7. Save something for the end though. It all looks deceptively easy and fairly flat. So push, but don't overextend.' Dr Evil

Water point 1: 44km
Water point 2: 64km
Water point 3: 99km



Stage 5

Date: 26 March 2009
Start/Finish: Greyton to Oak Valley
Distance: 111km
Climbing: 2233m
Cut-off time: 17:00

The towering ancient trees wave goodbye to the riders as they head out of Greyton. After a relatively easy day in the saddle, some jagged climbs might strike a cruel blow to the morale early in this stage. The first big push of the day is a 4km rocky affair. Far in the distance, on the next peak, riders will see an enigmatic UFO-like structure – rest assured, it is not fatigue playing tricks on your mind, but unfortunately neither have the extra-terrestrials come to the rescue! A fast downhill brings the field to the 'Noordekloof' climb – another 2km of demanding climbing on rough surfaces. Respite comes soon after with the beautiful flowing dual tracks alongside the railway line all the way to Botriver. As Elgin/Grabouw appears on the horizon, riders see the beautiful orchards ahead. But after another visit to a Cape Nature Conservation area, there are more steep climbs along the way. Riders' efforts on the steep rises will not be in vain however, as several kilometres of swooping forest singletrack lie in wait. Even the most tired competitor will be smiling. And just as they pop out of the forest, they're home in Oak Valley, Elgin/Grabouw.

'The UFO climb is hard and long so make it count. Riders can make up a lot of time if they're strong.' Dr Evil

Water point 1: 18km
Water point 2: 58km
Water point 3: 81km



Stage 6

Date: 27 March 2009
Start/Finish: Oak Valley
Distance: 86km
Climbing: 1546m
Cut-off time: 16:00

A neutral convoy takes the field to the N2, after which they're set free on the 6km track towards the water tower. Here the field will spread out on the roads through the quarry and back towards the Steenbras Dam. At the 15km mark they pass the tower and soon follow the steep and technical descent of Wolfkloof – a rare privilege bestowed upon the 1000 riders passing through with the Absa Cape Epic. Thanks to Cape Nature Conservation, riders then visit Kogelberg, where the radical descents and narrow tracks will have to be negotiated with some of the unique Fynbos which have made this area world-famous. Grabbing at the handlebars! Over a river crossing, through a farm and up to Houwteq, riders then find themselves back in the singletrack haven of Lebanon. Then it's back to Oak Valley to cap off a very demanding day in the saddle.

'Be very wary on the descent of Wolfkloof – it's steep and very rocky – perhaps the most dangerous section of the race. Keep your momentum and stay alert.' Dr Evil

Water point 1: 28km

Water point 2: 44km

Water point 3: 75k



Stage 7

Date: 28 March 2009

Start/Finish: Oak Valley to Lourensford

Distance: 60km

Climbing: 1760m

Cut-off time: 15:30 (Start at 08:30)

Tradition dictates that the last stage is the shortest, but never easy. Again, when we see vineyards we see short, sharp climbs and then some longer and even steeper ones through the Nuweberg. Soon the riders will begin to smell home as they near the bottom of Gamtoe Pass. As any Absa Cape Epic veteran will tell you, this is a compulsory portage section through this National Heritage site. A close look at the path will reveal Voortrekker wagons tracks, heading down to the railway line. Through wine country, riders then have Lourensford in their sights, their eyes trained on the finish. Waiting for them are their loved ones, their finisher's medal, and a heroes' welcome. *'Gamtoe pass is too near the finish to make a silly mistake. Rather walk down than run. It's too risky.'* Dr Evil

Water point 1: 28km

Water point 2: 42km

