

Zisimopoulos and Allen take convincing wins at RMB UTCT 100 miler, joint winner in the UT100 100km

SA women power their way to fifth and sixth overall at RMB UTCT 100 miler

The 2022 edition of the RMB Ultra-trail Cape Town (RMB UTCT), South Africa's premier festival of trail running, wrapped up in Cape Town on Sunday 27 November after three days of tough, exciting racing from some of the world's best. Powerful performances from the South African women in the inaugural 100 miler saw Kerry-Ann Marshall (from Cape Town) and Naomi Brand (now living in New Zealand) cross the finish in second and third place among the women, achieving an incredible fifth and sixth place overall.

This new flagship race of the established RMB UTCT adds to the other race formats: a 23km, 35km, 55km, 100km. The 100km race is now firmly on the international ultra-trail calendar, with the 100 miler sure to attract an even bigger field next year.

UTCT (166km)

The 166kms with 7516m of vertical gain covers most of the 100km course, up and across Table Mountain and down to the Atlantic Seaboard, adding the southern Peninsula mountains, via the flowing trails from Silvermine to Kalk Bay then Simon's Town. Runners move on to Kommetjie, Noordhoek and Hout Bay area, heading for the front face of Table Mountain via the Constantia winelands and Cecilia and Newlands forests.

Fotis Zisimopoulos was untouchable from very early on in the race, finishing in under 21 hours (20:48:17). Aleksei Tolstenko (Neutral) 21:30:17, and Elov Olsson (SWE) 22.30:11, were second and third respectively. The top six positions included the women's podium, with American Hillary Allen taking fourth place overall in the women's race, with Marshall in fifth as the second woman, and Brand finishing sixth overall as the third placed woman.

The common theme amongst the runners in both the 100km and the 100 miler, was the challenge of the technical trails. Zisimopoulos says: "The paths were totally technical, you have to do big steps for the rocks, and the plants make it more difficult. But this is the mountains and why we do this, otherwise you should just run on the road. This was a race to remember."

Tolstenko and Olsson ran much of the race crossing each other's paths, talking briefly but not running together. Tolstenko managed to get ahead before Kalk Bay (74km), then Olsson caught up and was out of the Simon's Town Aid Station before Tolstenko (96km). By Kommetjie Tolstenko was again feeling strong and picked up the pace, managing a small

breakaway around Chapman's peak. Olsson says he was difficult to catch after that as Tolstenko was stronger on the technical descents.

Zisimopoulos says his lowest point in the race was at 96km at 4am when he experienced stomach problems, but he kept going and was strong again within the next ten kilometres: "In ultra races you do these circles all the time, you feel fine then you feel bad, then you feel good again. When I feel bad I just go slowly but keep moving forward."

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He made a point to note that the route markings were excellent and said there was no chance of getting lost, and that the energy of the people at the Aid Stations was very helpful.

Asked about running 100 miles entirely alone, he said: "I always train alone, I run to find balance and solve problems, not for company. This was a race to remember."

Tolstenko says that he knew after 20kms that it would not be possible to win the race, and that this was the most difficult 100 miles he has ever done, but the most beautiful: "You have to fully concentrate on these very difficult trails. In the night the wind was so strong it felt like it could take you off the trails, and in the day it was very hot."

In the middle of the race he wanted to give up, but credited his Adidas Terrex team with the support that carried him through. He says that the most memorable part was running on the beach at sunrise with the crashing waves. Asked if he will be back, he says, laughing: "Only for the 100km!"

Olsson says that doing a 100 miler is like a different sport: "It is so long, you have to be patient as you can blow up so easily. It is more like an adventure doing 100 miles. A 100km race is more competitive from the beginning."

In the women's 100 miler, Hillary Allen (USA) 24:55:22 and the Dutch athlete Ragna Dabats ran out fast together from the start, but Dabats withdrew at Kalk Bay (74km), leaving Allen to maintain a strong lead in the front for the rest of the race. Allen took fourth place overall with this incredible run, and the next two women claimed fifth and sixth overall.

Kerry-Ann Marshall (RSA) 25:39:21 ran conservatively behind Brand (RSA) 26:28:29 and Nicolette Griffioen, another strong South African athlete, while Brand and Griffioen were running together much of the time. Marshall surged in the late stages to pass Brand.

Allen was thrilled and said of running alone for much of the race: "I am not used to running alone, but some of my best races I have taken an opportunity to open up a gap, and I felt that I had one when I started to push up to Suther Peak. The downhill after that is really flowy and fun. I just told myself to take the opportunity and open it up and try to see if I can extend a lead, create a gap.

"In the night, I was scared of the wind because in Colorado, the wind means a storm is coming, so it kind of made me a bit nervous. I was trying to work on just calming myself down with deep breaths; there were some sections where it was blowing me off the trail, it was intense.

She reiterates that an ultra is a mental game: "I have done a lot of work on the mental side of things. My last race at UTMB I just went to a really dark place, one of the darkest places I've ever been to in an ultra. I worked with my sports psychologist on mentality and visualisation, visualising myself in a good place. So when I hit that wall, which I did, I stayed there for a little bit, but was able to work on changing it. In ultra running, especially in 100 milers, you end up racing alone, so you have to learn how to push, and continue pushing yourself even when you don't feel so good.

Allen was another runner who commented on the combination of technical trails and the beauty of the surroundings: "These trails are some of the most diverse and technical, and just beautiful, but incredibly challenging. I come from a background of skyrunning and I run technical trails, I know what that looks like. But this is by far the longest continuous technical trail I've ever run. I would say if you want a good challenge, come and check it out. And then if you're really hurting, just look around at the views and it'd be okay.

"It was awesome to have the 100km runners, including my really good friend Drew, pass us, as well as Jared Hazen."

Marshall said she was very scared at the start: "I was crying, I just didn't know what to expect and how to manage my emotions, because it's a massive task."

She said of Brand and Griffioen: "They had an incredible race. They ran really, really well. I caught them before we went down Vlakkenberg towards Constantia, and they were both suffering from dehydration. We took on water and Naomi came with me. (Griffioen withdrew at Constantia Glen after 139kms and 22 hours and 41 minutes on the trails.)

"I managed to break away from Naomi through the vineyards of Constantia. My legs felt good and I could run, so I ran the climbs. It was quite a relief after all the rocks and sand, to move nicely. I thought Naomi was chasing me, I had no idea where she was so I really

worked hard to the finish. Today I'm very proud and very honoured. It's a real privilege to be part of this phenomenal event that has drawn world class athletes."

Brand noted that Dabats and Allen ran out very fast: "Nicolette and I knew that if you start too fast, it's a very, very long race. On this course, the front runners are usually not the front runners when we finish. I learned from past mistakes and held back a little bit.

"The two of us had a battle all day. We were swapping places all the time, and with Ragna until Kalk Bay (74km). It was intense. We know each other quite well and both struggled with dark times, so we helped each other quite a bit. It was Kerry-Ann's first 100 mile race and I think she was also very conservative. That paid off in the end because she had just that little bit more legs. She came out of nowhere and we ran together for a bit, but she broke away and flew like a bird."

"I've been missing out on this race for a few years and was crying big crocodile tears in New Zealand last year, as it has always been such a big part of our year. To have my dad crying at aid stations and the other support from the community, was the most special thing," she said.

UT100 (100km)

Hannes Namberger (GER) and Dmitry Mityaev (Neutral) crossed in joint first position in 10:45:35, after running much of the race together. While their finish was nearly 30 minutes slower than the new record set by Jim Walmsley in 2021, the course has been adjusted and slower times were expected. After roughly 40kms together, with 10kms to go, Mityaev and Namberger agreed to remain together until the finish. Drew Holmen (USA) 10:51:20 was third after a close race between him and Jared Hazen (USA) 11:02:28, in fourth.

Sébastien Spehler, who had been in first and second position for much of the first 50 kms, dropped back and withdrew at Hout Bay (56kms) after 6:02:29. Johan Lantz, positioned between fifth and seventh early on in the race, also withdrew in Hout Bay. A bad ankle roll left him barely able to walk.

Namberger says: "It was a beautiful day. Right from the beginning, my legs felt really good and I tried to make my own race, but the only problem was that the course was so tough, very technical. You're always on the limit and have to be very focused and concentrating, always looking down at the trail so that you don't make mistakes. Dmitry passed me at the beach, and he was super strong on the uphill and I couldn't follow him. But on the flat and a little bit on the downhill, I was a bit faster.

"We had the perfect match, we worked together but not from the beginning, at first it was a

fight. Then we saw the others coming closer so we worked together. He went first on the uphill, and made the speed, then I tried to follow him on the downhill and I made the speed. We had a small gap on the third, so we worked together so that we didn't get second and third. At Alphen Trail we decided on a quick stop at the aid station, then let's go forward, move and push - then at 10kms before the finish line we said 'okay,let's do it together'. We had spent the whole day together and it was really beautiful to share the success. That's running. That's why we do this sport."

Mityaev similarly says the course was technical: "I have been here for one month so I had seen the route. It is wonderful but very technical with lots of jumps and my muscles are very sore now. From the beginning Hannes ran faster, only from 32kms we were together. I lost the markers for a little and followed the 100 mile course, and after that I caught him and we ran together. This was a very good race, I am very happy to finish it with Hannes, I think it is good for trail running and for our sport, I love this."

Compatriots Drew Holmen and Jared Hazen ran together for some of the race, but Holmen was stronger during the last push from UCT: "I started out planning to stay controlled until Hout Bay (56km), and the start of the race went well until the top of Table Mountain. That section on the top was just so technical, it was brutal. I ran with Jared most of the way to the beach, where Daniël caught us briefly. Then Jared and I ran together until Rocket Road (47km) and I split away a bit up to Suther Peak, and it was smooth on the downhill. I struggled with stomach issues but felt strong on the climb out of Hout Bay and caught Sébastien which was quite a boost. I kept thinking I could catch the front two, but it did not happen, and then Jared caught me coming into UCT (88km) which scared me, so I pushed hard and ran up to Block House and I didn't look back. I was super happy to come in third today.

"This race is nothing short of spectacular, everything was a dream. I can't wait to come back and race, or just to run and get to know this community, it's a very special community you have here in Cape Town, I feel lucky and thankful I had this opportunity."

Two South Africans took the fifth and sixth positions, Daniël Claassen and Matthew Healy, before the top three international women Camille Bruyas (FRA), Mimmi Kotka (SWE) and Varvara Shikanova (Neutral) claimed the women's podium and seventh, eight and ninth positions overall.

Bruyas says: "The first 20kms I was just behind the two first women and I didn't know if my shape was not good or if it's super fast, and it was super fast. So I said, okay, let's let go at a new pace! It's a super nice race. You have a lot of technical parts, and sometimes you are in the middle of nothing; you just have to follow and try to go faster because you don't see anybody. I love this, when you are alone in the mountains with nice views, and there are

a lot of nice views."

Kotka, who had a very strong run in the early stages of the race, says she struggled between Llandudno and Constantia (42km-56km). "It was a bit of a stretch considering my injuries, but I really wanted to come here and race and I am super happy with second place. Camille was on fire and whoever is the best on the day is the best on the day. This course is very different from when I did it last time, the most runnable parts have been replaced with the least runnable parts, so it's a completely different race in its character, I would say. It's just spectacular, so beautiful, and gnarly and technical.

"It is a true trail race, and I just loved it. Some races have this mythical allure to them and the combination of fantastic organisation and fantastic nature creates this experience. There are a few of them around the world that I have had the great fortune of experiencing, and this is definitely one of them."

Shikanova was aware that Ekaterina Mtiyaeva was on her heels in the second half of the race: "After about 56 kilometres, or maybe four kilometres later, I was in third. I was so tired but I thought Ekaterina would catch me so I used all my power to finish like this. Sometimes I was running with some of the men, but then I finished alone.

"These are amazing trails and the first part is like skyrunning, it's very technical and you're climbing. And it's so wow, super nice. Then the second half is typical trail running and this mix is very good, I liked it. The nature in South Africa is different and very interesting, not like in Europe or in Russia, and I enjoyed every kilometre."

Runner safety was prioritised when a fire above Imizamo Yethu in Hout Bay threatened to get out of control due to strong winds. 93 runners in the 100 miler and 71 runners in the 100km race were rerouted and then shuttled from Hout Bay to Constantia Glen avoiding any potential risk to runners' safety and all were able to continue with the race.

PT55 (55km)

In the PT55, the 55km race on Friday 26 November, well-known Cape Town athlete Landie Greyling was first in the women's race (06:23:31), a mere 5 seconds before Kim Schreiber from Germany. They were 13th and fourteenth overall and Sumé van Heerden (RSA) came third. The men's podium was filled by international runners Robbie Simpson (GBR) 05:00:28, Jeshurun Small (USA) 05:13:25 and Mads Louring (DEN) 05:22:19.

RESULTS

UTCT (166km)

1. Fotis Zisimopoulos (GRE) 20:48:17
2. Aleksei Tolstenko (Neutral) 21:30:17
3. Elov Olsson (SWE) 22.30:11

Women

1. Hillary Allen (USA) 24:55:22 - 4th overall
2. Kerry-Ann Marshall (RSA) 25:39:21 - 5th overall
3. Naomi Brand (RSA) 26:28:29 - 6th overall

UT100 (100km)

1. Hannes Namberger (GER) and Dmitry Mityaev (Neutral) - 10:45:35
3. Drew Holman (USA) 10:51:20
4. Jared Hazen (USA) 11:02:28
5. Daniël Claassen (RSA) 11:26:42
6. Matthew Healy (RSA) 12:04:10

Women

1. Camille Bruyas (FRA) 12:15:21 - 7th overall
2. Mimmi Kotka (SWE) 12:35:28 - 8th overall
3. Varvara Shikanova (RUS) 12:38:33 - 9th overall
4. Ekaterina Mityaeva (RUS) - 10th overall

PT55

1. Robbie Simpson (GBR) 05:00:28
2. Jeshurun Small (USA) 05:13:25
3. Mads Lourcing (DEN) 05:22:19

Women

1. Landie Greyling (RSA) 06:23:31 - 13th overall
2. Kim Schreiber (GER) 06:23:36 - 14th overall

3. Sumé van Heerden (RSA) 06:25:26 - 16th overall

For full results, and the results of the EX23 and TM35 races, visit the RMB Ultra-trail Cape Town website www.ultratrailcapetown.com