

Last 4 day la Ruta kicks off on Wednesday.

The 2008 La Ruta de los Conquistadores will take off this Wednesday November 12th. All the training, mental preparation and light weight equipment, will be paying off this week, rumors are that this will be the last edition of the 4 day stage format, apparently it will be changing to 5 stages with 5 star all inclusive hotels and a eco-tent day where the riders will have the chance to see the green forest and wild animals of Costa Rica.

2008 will be Prado's 5th La Ruta, with each passing year he has stepped up little by little into the top list of riders to be seen at the punta" as they call it in Costa Rica referring to the front of the pack.

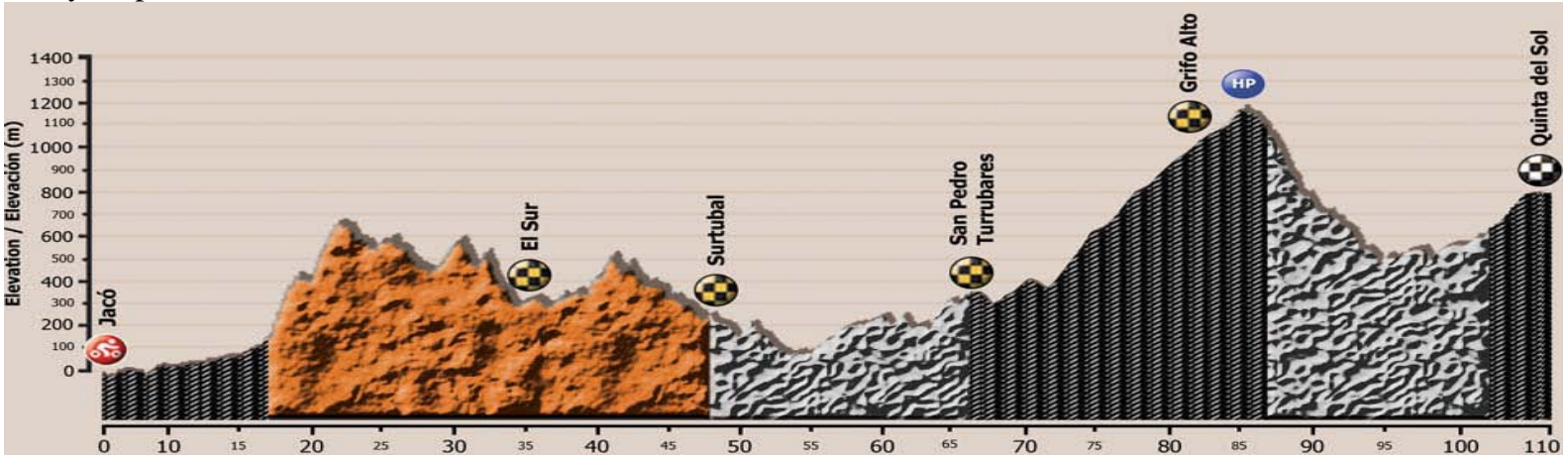
As usual Prado starts to log more miles and more climbing starting in August all the way up to the first week of November. With a solid 2008 season the Pro-Elite rookie Manny" will be more than happy to be lined up with big time names in the cycling world, here are a few things that have happened in the last few days close to the main event.

La Ruta is a very different event compared to any other MTB race, most racers choose to ride hardtail bikes and little front suspension, but Prado doesn't follow trends without prior testing to make sure what works best. Before the race 2 bikes were tested to see what bike will offer him the best chance to step up into the top 5 Elite group at la Ruta. The new 2009 Stumpjumper hardtail was tested but after long 5-7 hour rides the lack of suspension in the back of the bike was leaving him a bit tired; the fast rocky descents were also a bit slower compared to his full suspension test. So the goal was to build a 2009 S-Works Epic as light as possible to race with it at La Ruta. After getting the frame, fork and crank set Prado went to the Rock N' Road shop and picked the lightest parts on the shelf, some had to be special ordered and by the end his S-Works Epic came out to be 19.8 pounds with pedals, water bottle cage and bar ends. The new Epic frame is much lighter than the previous 2008 version; the stiffness under pedaling loads was also noticeable, the brain shock felt way more plush and the adjustments allows the rider to tune it up witch ever way he wants, from hardtail feel to all-mountain freeride feel. The Epic has had a few changes in the past few years but for 2009 the bike showed him a different handling stile, especially in the descents. At the end after all the testing Prado will be riding his sub 20 pound S-Works Epic at the toughest MTB Race in the world.



Now back to the race, over 400 riders will take off from Jaco Beach this Wednesday November 12th the finish line for the first stage will be 14.000 feet and 120klms away, jungle, mud, steep descents and of course more climbing that you will ever imagine, some sections or the road will have the Pro riders on their granny gears riding up 20+% grades. Some wonder how the local government is able to pave some of this steep climbs, rumors are that they pour the concrete from the top and because is so steep it goes all the way down.....no joke you have to see it to believe it. Just to make it even better the organizers added about 18klms more to the first stage compared to last year, those who have done the race before know that the first stage is the hardest one of the 4, but now is even.....let's call it better....

Last year profile.

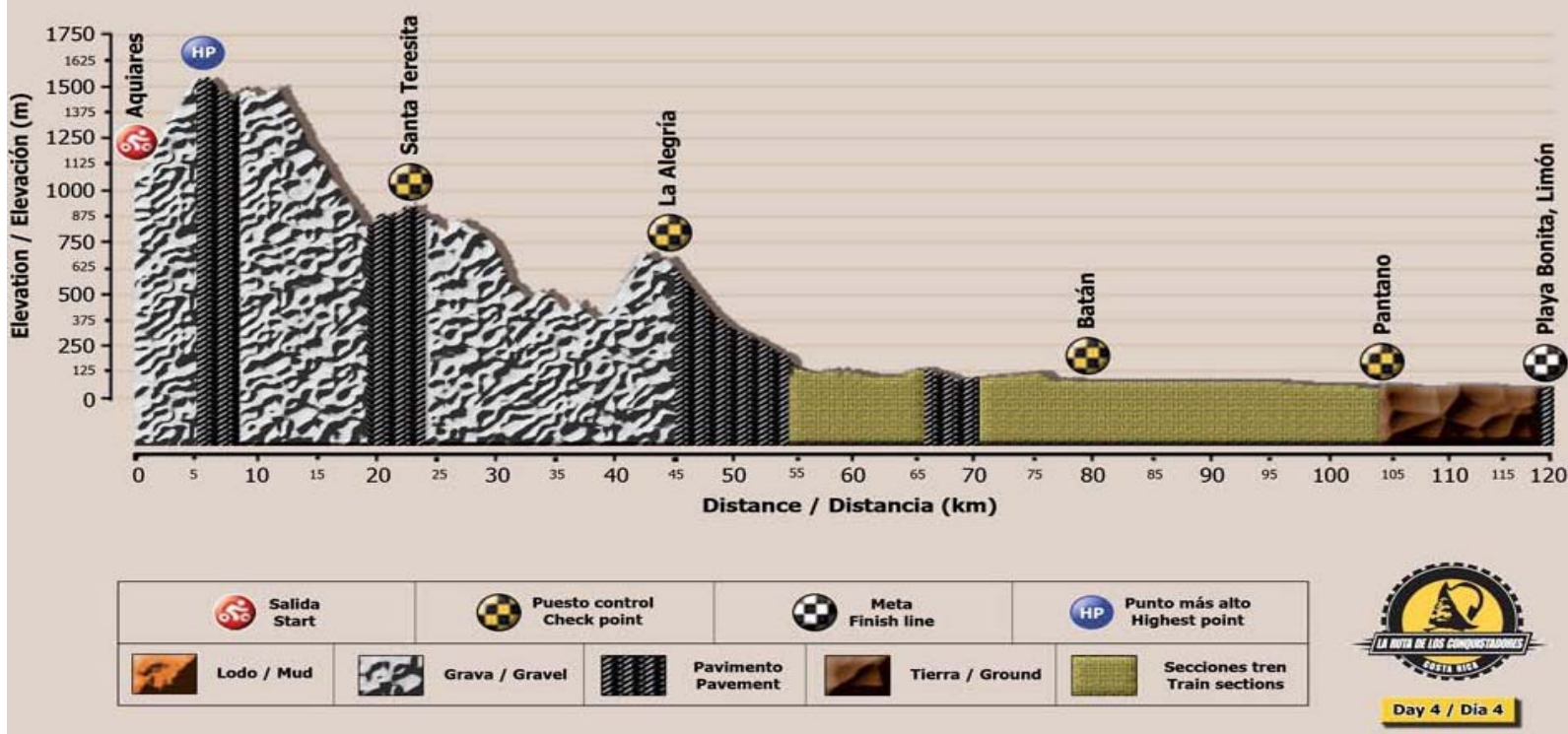


Prado had the chance to preview and pre-ride most of stage 2 just a few days before the race, many people thought that stage 2 was just a short stage that the new route had, but it is not like that. The first climb has changed from last year, the new route will send riders up the steepest climbs you've ever seen, short in distance but it gains lots of elevation shortly. The start of the day is set at 4000feet, in just over 12klms riders will have gained 3.000 feet and now they will be grasping for air at almost 7.000 feet. The top 10 Elite riders will take about 60 minutes to climb it, for the rest of the pack it could be a long hike, traction is not a problem but is so steep that fatigue will test each rider's endurance and strength. As you know steep climbs=steep descents, for those with full suspension the downhill will be fun, for the rest it is going to be just as brutal as the climb itself.

The famous stage 3 has a little bit more gradual climbs, but the real challenge is the weather that changes very quick and for those who have done it or have hear about it they know that the descent of the 3rd day is long and unforgiving, broken bones, wheels and bikes will be the stories told at the end of the day. For those with a change to look around they will encounter some great vistas as well as some old towns that date back to the 1800's. Prado knows these towns well but only during training he has the chance to look around, during the race is all about concentration and tactics and there is no chance to look around much. He is really looking forward to try his new S-Works Epic in the 2hour+ descent, were many riders will be walking their bikes Prado will be flying by with 4 inches of smart-travel.

For stage 4 the strategy will be to make a few changes to his machine, faster bigger tires and a larger big chainring will be key factors at the last stage, going from a 1.8S-Works Saucer mud tire to a 1.9Fastrak SLK tire to handle the fast fire road descents as well as the train track sections. For the first 3 stages Prado will have a 26t-42t double ring combination, but for day 4 he will have a 28t-44t combo to make sure he can handle to 70+KPH fire road descents, swapping the rings should take less than 3 minutes, the new S-Works Carbon cranks are very easy to swap, it only has 1bolt to take the whole cranks apart. The 28t ring will help him climb almost any climb on day 4, once he arrives to the 44klm mark he will go to his big 44t ring and stay there till the finish, but to make it there he

will need to ride over the train tracks to enter Puerto Limon where he will be almost done with one of his goal races for the year, the rewarding feeling of accomplishment will take away all the pain his legs will feel.



What are you waiting for? Start riding now and get ready to challenge your skills, endurance and strength at one of the many Marathon or Stage races going on in the world of MTB racing.

Sure this events sound really hard and they are, but the memories and stories will last forever. For those lucky ones with access to fast, light equipment the challenge will be a lot more fun.

Toughness is not a destination; it's a journey without end.

See you out there.....

[For day by day stage profiles click here.](#)

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Thanks for reading.

