

## Bookwalter Holds Off Peloton For Win

Written by Barry Ryan

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### ***Courtesy of CyclingNews.com***

A typically windswept day of racing at the Tour of Qatar ended with a surprise winner as Brent Bookwalter (BMC) claimed victory on stage 1 to Dukhan Beach. The American was part of a three-man

group which forged clear in the finale, and then defied the odds and a block headwind to fend off the peloton.

The bunch had spent the bulk of the day in a viscous state, with echelons continuously ebbing and flowing as crosswinds buffeted the race, and by the time the decisive move arrived with 10km to go, there were plenty of tired legs and weary minds in a front group which had been siphoned off to fewer than 60 riders.

The winning attack was sparked by Martin Elmiger (IAM Cycling), who ghosted off the front and drew fellow countryman Gregory Rast (RadioShack-Trek) and Bookwalter across with him. In spite of the headwind, the trio of leaders quickly built up a lead of 45 seconds, while back in the main peloton, the Omega Pharma-QuickStep team of Mark Cavendish, John Degenkolb's Argos-Shimano squad, as well as Orica GreenEdge and Sky, took some time to find harmony in their chase effort.

"I was a bit surprised that they didn't react," said Rast, but while that impasse behind doubtless aided the trio upfront, credit is due to Bookwalter and Elmiger, in particular, for navigating the headwind and ensuring the break stayed afloat into the final kilometre. In spite of their efforts, however, the peloton was now breathing down their necks entering the final 500 metres, and Bookwalter was forced to the front to keep the break ticking over.

"I was kind of hoping to get one more pull through from those guys, but they both said no with 500 to go, so I just tried to keep it rolling on," Bookwalter said afterwards.

Bookwalter's turn kept the impetus with the three leaders, and when an anxious Rast opened his sprint early to ensure that he took at least third place, Bookwalter jumped smartly on his wheel and then eased his way around him inside the final 150 metres to take the biggest win of his career to date.

"It's my first big win in an international race like this and it came in a surprising way," said Bookwalter, who held off Elmiger and Rast, while Bernhard Eisel (Sky) beat Elia Viviani (Cannondale) and Cavendish in the sprint for 4th, just on their coattails.

Bookwalter was one of five BMC riders in the leading group on the run-in to the finish, just reward for a team whose aggression throughout the day had been instrumental in scattering the peloton to the four winds. In the finale, the squad had intended to try and work a sprint victory for Adam Blythe, but Bookwalter had instructions to track the moves, and he followed his orders to the letter.

"If you're going to be on the front, you might as well be in the break if the numbers are right and you're feeling good," said Bookwalter, the first wearer of the golden jersey. "And my legs were still good."

Bookwalter enters Monday's team time trial with a lead of four seconds over Elmiger, while Rast, Eisel and his BMC teammate Phinney lie a further two seconds back. "We're here to perform," Bookwalter said. "We had a number of guys in that front group and I think we'll do a

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good team time trial tomorrow."

**Photo Courtesy: Brent Bookwalter, LMC Athletics**