

DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Two young local mountain bikers have been mixing it with the best in their age group nationally

Wednesday 10 September 2014

GUERNSEY PRESS

Velo Club riders shine in National MTB series



Sam Culverwell, far right, stands on the rostrum with his fellow medallists at the fifth round of the National Mountain Bike series in Cannock Chase.

SAM CULVERWELL sprinted to a third place finish in the fifth and final round of the National Mountain Bike series at Cannock Chase. This was enough to give the 13-year-old third place overall in the juvenile category and cement his second place in the national rankings. Meanwhile, Hannah English took sixth place in the youth female category to give her fourth spot in her age category. The five-round series took place in various locations around the country and Sam's consistent performances have earned him a reputation as one of the country's top juvenile riders. And racing on the same courses as the senior riders is proving a good training ground for improving the young rider's skills. The course at Cannock featured a mix of both fast and technical single-track, challenging technical sections and short, sharp climbs. 'The course really suited me, I liked the technical sections and although I was a bit slower through the tight technical single track I was able to make

up time on the climbs,' said the youngster. 'I knew I had to finish ahead of Sean Flynn to get third place in the series, but I had a great start and I was racing in a fast group, so all I had to do was finish with them.' Despite Sam having a comfortable lead of a minute on Sean, this didn't stop him pushing for the win. With Sam entering the finish loops with Harry Birchill and Ben Healy on the final lap, the trio were racing hard and the last 50 metres ended in an exciting flat-out sprint with Sam just being edged out in the last metres. Gary Wallbridge, the Guernsey Velo Club president, said: 'This was clearly Sam's finest race of the year and testament to the way he has prepared throughout the season and a great way to finish his season of MTB racing in the UK. 'He is one of the many riders coming through the youth programme who are capable of competing at a national level and it shows the commitment, not just from the riders but the coaches and helpers, is really paying off.'

Hannah admitted it was not one of her best races. 'I was having a hard race and struggled a bit through the rock garden. 'The other girls have been getting stronger and stronger all season but I thought that I was going to secure third place in the series, but Sophie Wright rode incredibly well and won and when the results were counted back this gave her third place. 'I'm disappointed, but it does now take the pressure off for next season. I'm going to step back a bit and concentrate on my GCSEs now.' Due to their consistent riding throughout the season, Sam and Hannah have been selected by British Cycling to represent the UK's south region team in the Inter Regional MTB Championships in September. Hannah is experienced in this event, having been selected several times, but this is the first time for Sam as the riders are normally selected from the Youth category – so it is a step up in age group for him to be competing against riders up to two years older.