

Luxembourg's Speed Skaters end the season in style

Text & Photos: Simon Murphy



Peter Murphy (55) sprints away from the start in Adam

While most people will have been enjoying the glorious weather over the Easter weekend, Luxembourg's two youngest speed skaters, Caroline Murphy (girls U10) and Augustin Géré (boys U10), were at the Easter Cup in Gent, putting the finishing touches to the first full international season of CHLPV, Luxembourg's (only) short track speed skating club; a season which turned out to be successful beyond what anyone could have dared hope when it kicked off with Turnout in October.

For those not so familiar with the sport, short track competitions are usually raced over two or three distances, using the so-called "all final" format, whereby every skater gets the same number of races over the competition. All skaters are sorted into a final ranking, with the winner the most consistent skater over all distances skated.

Distances skated normally range from 222m (two laps) to 1,500m (13 ½ laps). A typical competition may have around 150 skaters,

across all age categories, each skater having typically seven or eight races over two days, with around 200 races in total. Even the youngest skaters can attain speeds in excess of 30 kph and with four to six skaters on the ice at the same time, and in close contact, races can be quite spectacular. However, strict rules on protective gear and the rink side padding mean that even when skaters do fall serious injuries are thankfully very rare.

Over the course of the season the club sent skaters to five international competitions in Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as skaters being granted a special licence to compete in the UK in order to gain competition experience. In every competition Luxembourg's skaters gave an excellent account of themselves and, even though not everyone could get onto the podium, all skaters improved their personal bests significantly at whatever distance skated, from 222 to 1000m, over the course of the season. In this respect all the other competition skaters deserve a special mention, namely; Yvan Levoy (senior men) Eric Géré (masters men), Max Backström

(boys U16), Cameron Bisset (boys U14) Cecilia Backström (girls U14), Peter Murphy (boys U12) and Luca Pelaccia (boys U12).

Nevertheless Luxembourg skaters were on the podium at all competitions entered, with the most notable performances coming from the very youngest skaters, especially as the U10s often had to skate in a combined U12 category. Caroline Murphy led the way with three third places in international U12 competitions and first place in the girls U12 at Aldwych (UK), as well as being unbeaten against all other U10s all season. Augustin Géré was not far behind, usually coming first or second against the other U10s.

The best overall club performance of the season probably came at the Dutch Junior Open at Amsterdam, where Caroline won her third place by skating several older skaters to a standstill in the final race of the competition over 777m. This was followed up by her brother Peter in the U12 who, in his very first season of skating and only his second international competition, shocked many more experienced

skaters with his lightning fast starts, only missing out on second place overall by 1/100 s in the final race. Unfortunately the following weekend, the Closing Games at Turnhout, just as he seemed set for an even better performance, a fall in the heats of the 222m put paid to any hopes of glory after lying in second place overall at the halfway point. Turnhout also marked another stage in the development of the club where two mixed Luxembourg-Aldwych teams competed in the relays, (perhaps the most spectacular and confusing of races with up to five teams of four skaters on the ice at the same time).

On to Gent, and although Caroline and Augustin couldn't quite make the podium at U12 level, they did come first and second respectively at U10 level. To complete the season Caroline was awarded the Golden Sun Award for her consistent performance over four competitions, with Augustin coming second in the boys classification.

Although the club can look back on the season with great satisfaction, greater challenges await next season, when it is hoped that at least one skater can qualify for the so-called "Star Class" a competition that brings together all the best skaters in Western Europe.

For anyone interested in the sport in general a wealth of information, including the results of all the competitions and profiles of the club skaters is available at www.shorttrackonline.info.

All are welcome when the season restarts in mid-September at the weekly Sunday training sessions.