



Riders and runners sharing the course. Photo: Ben Kimball

## THE VERMONT 100: A CULTURE OF UNITY

Max Hines | 08/07/2024

On the third weekend in July, runners and riders flocked to the dirt roads of central Vermont, toeing the line and completing a 100-mile adventure known as the [Vermont 100](#).

The race is part of the [Grand Slam of Ultrarunning](#), a five-race series that also includes the Old Dominion 100, Western States 100, Leadville Trail 100 and Wasatch 100, and has become one of the oldest, most revered 100-milers in the country. However, it started in the 1960s—as an untimed horse ride.

Over decades, the ride developed into a race and after a brief hiatus in the 80s, resumed in 1989, the year ultrarunners toed the starting line. In the inaugural event, 114 runners ambitiously set off alongside the horses on the 100-mile course.

The race grew organically, adding a 100k distance in 2008 while forming a long-lasting partnership with [Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports](#). It was around that time Amy Rusiecki, a multiple-time podium finisher herself, who took the helm as race director in 2015, formally added a category for athletes with disabilities in 2017, becoming the first trail race in the world to do so.

This change “shine[d] a spotlight and also attract[ed] some of the top adaptive athletes to the race,” race director Amy Rusiecki told *UltraRunning Magazine*.

Rusiecki’s vision has paid off, as Vermont’s reputation has indeed attracted such runners from across the country.

“This year we had an athlete from the Midwest, and he was like ‘Oh, I finished a 100 [miler] and I have impaired vision, and everyone said, you have to run Vermont;” said Rusiecki. “That’s really special to see that the word is making it out there, and that it’s a race that [adaptive athletes] want to run because they feel very supported and welcomed.”

Although in recent years the race has had major challenges, with COVID-forced cancellations in 2020 and 2021, and catastrophic flooding forcing a cancellation in 2023. However, perfect conditions and sunny skies greeted the runners—and horses—for a successful event this year.

The race was led by an incredibly strong women’s field, with five women in the top 10 overall.

“We had a female in the lead for the majority of the race,” said Rusiecki. “It was Lila Gaudrault in the lead for...the first 50 miles, and then she faded back a little bit.”

Gaudrault, who is 21 years old and already a winner of many local races, was closely followed by Sarah Gage.

Gage “passed [Gaudrault] somewhere between 50 and 60 miles, and at one point, the gap between the lead female and the lead male...grew pretty large,” per Rusiecki.

Gage went on to win the race overall with a stellar time of 17:19. Men’s winner Spencer Imbach stormed back to close the gap at the end, finishing just 5 minutes behind Gage in a time of 17:24.

While mid-race splits aren’t available, the men’s race was likely tightly contested throughout, as Aaron Stevens and Michael Scarlett finished 4 and 9 minutes behind Imbach, respectively, for second through fourth overall. With a men’s podium separated by less than 9 minutes and overall first through fourth separated by 14 minutes, it was an incredible finish line to watch.

The excitement only increased, as Gaudrault, who had faltered in the later miles, and [Laurel Highlands 70.5-mile champion Justyna Wilson](#) approached the finish line in a sprint for second place with the two finishing in a virtual tie.



*Second-place female finisher, Justyna Wilson. Photo: Ben Kimball*

“Without a photo there, they were literally sprinting and trying to out-lean each other, and to me, it was not discernible,” said Rusiecki.

The memorable finish would have not been even close if Wilson had not made up significant ground in the later miles, indicating her racing strategy proved to be successful.

“Justyna was running behind Jenny Hoffman at [mile 60]... in third and fourth, or they might have been fourth or fifth,” recalled Rusiecki. “Justyna had a really strong second half of the race to work all the way up to tie for second.”

Closing out the top 10 was another tight finish, with Christine Mosley and Peter Flood separated by just under 40 seconds. Outside of the fastest times, Rusiecki also took the time to highlight some inspirational mid-pack and back-of-the-pack stories from this year.

“Many of us in the race very quickly became John Maaroufi fans,” Rusiecki added. “He was the winner of our mobility-impaired division and he’s someone who’s been very open about [having] multiple sclerosis... we did an athletes with disabilities panel, and he spoke very openly about his experience and journey to the starting line. So, before he even started, everyone was on his side. Everyone just wanted to see him be successful, and so that was really special when he crossed the line.”

Also of note was Maria Chevalier, an accomplished ultrarunner who had yet to crack the code for the Vermont 100.

“She was bib number 10. It was her 10th time toeing the line and she had never reached the finish line before,” said Rusiecki. “This year, it was magical to see her finish. Once I knew she was clear of the last aid station and her crew were sitting at the finish, I couldn’t even look at them without crying, because it was just a decade plus of passion and attempts for Maria to get to that point.”

From the first to the last finishers, Rusiecki shares a culture of unity that keeps the Vermont 100 going year after year.

“It’s family. It’s community,” she said. “Whether it’s your first time or your 20th time, everyone feels like family.”

[Complete Results](#)