

Red Bull Rampage in Washington County

Extreme sports: Mountain bikers risk death for cash

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VIRGIN - They came to fly and challenge injury and even death, and that is what 15 mountain bike daredevils did Monday during the finals of the Red Bull Rampage: The Evolution, held in the sandstone cliffs of Washington County.

The energy drink maker invited 28 of the world's top fearless mountain bikers from eight countries to participate in the event that paid out \$20,000 in prize money to the top 12 finishers.

After two days of competition, Brandon Semenuk, 17, from Canada, emerged as the winner of the event and collected the \$10,000 first-place prize.

The Utah Sports Commission handed out \$5,000 to Thomas Vanderham, also from Canada, for the best trick.

Of the 28 riders, only 15 competed in Monday's final after a qualifying event on Sunday. Neither of two riders from Utah qualified.

The riders were judged on time, fluidity and poise as they raced down a mountainside, jumping off cliffs and wooden jumps constructed for the event to reach the finish line 1,000 vertical feet below the starting point.

More than 700 spectators hiked or rode their bikes four miles to the site on state trust lands near the town of Virgin to watch the maniacal bikers.

Josh Langston traveled from Las Vegas to watch the competition.

"They are people trying to defy death," Langston said. "I've never seen anything as crazy as this. They are able to do things the rest of us would like to do."

His daughter, Kennedy, also enjoyed the event.

"I like the crashes," she said.

And there were several wipeouts, but besides three shoulder separations, the nimble, and young, competitors usually just jumped up with little more than bruised egos.

Ryan Snyder spokesman for Red Bull, said other locations around the world, including the Gobi Desert and Baja, Mexico, were assessed for the event, but the southern Utah location won out and the company hopes to bring back the event.

"It's the ultimate big mountain riding site," he said.

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