

Clarke and Westley take 3rd places

Liptovsky Mikulas Slalom

There were a few surprises on a cold opening day of the World Cup in Slovakia with Slovenia's Jure Lenarcic and Great Britain's Bradley Forbes-Cryans upstaging more fancied rivals to top C1 and K1 qualifying, while Australia's Jessica Fox and Austria's Corinna Kuhnle lived up to form in the women's events. Forbes-Cryans finished just 0.18 seconds ahead of Czech world champion Ondrej Tunka in the men's K1. With team mate and Olympic gold medallist Joseph Clarke third fastest, 'I was definitely feeling up for the challenge today. I just wanted to go out there and try and deliver my best performance,' Forbes-Cryans said. 'I feel like I got pretty close to that. It's nice to see some rewards in what is an outstandingly difficult class. There's just so many good boats that are capable of winning these events.'

The biggest surprise at the top of qualifying on day one was Jure Lenarcic, a winner of two team gold medals at U23 level on the Liptovsky Mikulas course but still chasing his first senior C1 podium finish. Lenarcic finished ahead of a crack C1 field which included Olympic gold medallists Michel Martikan and Denis Gargaud-Chanut as well as a host of world and European champions. There were three Slovaks in the top ten with world championship silver medallist and local resident Alexander Slafkovsky qualifying ninth. 'The first mission is done; it was my plan to be in the top ten,' Slafkovsky said. 'It's really special; it's not so often that you get to start in front of the home crowd on the home course. All us Slovak guys are excited to be here and compete at home.'

Corinna Kuhnle followed up her European silver medal earlier in the month with a solid qualifying run in the women's K1, finishing 0.80 second ahead of reigning world champion Jessica Fox. 'I lost a little bit in the middle section but otherwise it was a well composed run,' Kuhnle said. 'The course is tricky but it's nice. It's a competition for the best canoeists in the world so I think it's good that we have tough courses. I had a 2nd in the Europeans so I guess that's my motivation to get one spot higher.'

'Fox found her way to the top of the leader board later in the day, knocking off younger sister Noemie by 1.71 seconds to head into Sunday's semi finals as the fastest qualifier. 'You just have to go and do your run and I was really happy with my race, just really solid and smooth,' Fox said. 'But I'm really happy for Noemie to get a good result in the qualifiers as well. It's nice to get that first run back on the international circuit so it's always good to get that out of the way and get a feel for it again.'

Reigning women's K1 world champion Jessica Fox and reigning men's C1 World Cup holder Sideris Tasiadis started the new season with emphatic victories on the Saturday. Fox was the last athlete on the tricky Liptovsky course but executed a perfect run to finish ahead of Corinna Kuehnle and Germany's Ricarda Funk. A 2 second penalty for the Austrian for a gate touch proved costly with the final margin 1.58 seconds. 'I'm really pleased with my K1 races, 2nd in the heats, 1st in the semis, and then to back that up with a win is awesome,' Fox said. 'It's always tough the first race of the season. Our last competition was the Australian Open; the Europeans have had their championships so you know the level's been up. There's pressure but there's also this expectation that I put on myself. I had a great season last year and I want to match that. I want to better that. I want to keep improving on that.'

Germany's Tasiadis won the overall men's C1 World Cup title last year but missed a medal in the world championships. He also won the opening World Cup in 2017 and was hoping this year he'd carry his form right through the season. Like Fox, he was the last paddler on the course, breaking the heart of local hope Alexander Slafkovsky who had held the lead since the second run of the 10 man final. Great Britain's Ryan Westley finished third, a 2 second penalty robbing him of a chance to follow up his European gold with a World Cup title but Tasiadis showed a long off season on the water had served him well. 'I've trained a lot in the winter and I've tried to change a little bit my technique,' Tasiadis said. 'I really want to have a medal at the world championships because I don't have a medal at that level. I just want to do exactly what I did here in all my preparation and to feel good on the water. We will see what happens. If I am as motivated as I am here we can make something happen in the world championships. There was a popular hometown win in the mixed C2 with Slovakia's Sona Stanovska and Jan Batik taking the gold. Stanovska lives 30 kilometres from the Liptovsky Mikulas venue and said the win was even more remarkable given the pair had only come together that week. It's our first race; we only had one session and just two runs and now gain we've had two runs and the second one was so good,' Stanovska said. 'This is like my home course and it's so good that so many Slovak fans have come.'

Jessica Fox brought up a winning double and Germany's Sebastian Schubert broke through for his first gold medal since 2014 in the final. Fox could not have been more impressive in the women's C1 final, blowing away the field to win by more than 7 seconds in cold and wet conditions. Her final time was an error free 106.34 with Czech



Jessica Fox was on form.



Bradley Forbes-Cryans in the top ten after starting strongly.