Rainbow warriors: Three things to watch at cycling world championships

AFP – Tadej Pogacar heads into the cycling world championships, which get underway in Zurich this weekend, with the chance to emulate former luminaries Stephen Roche and Eddy Merckx as a triple crown champion in a single season.

Meanwhile, Demi Vollering can pick herself up from a near miss at the Tour de France Femmes. She may also win a second title in a men's and women's race unique to cycling.

In all 11 rainbow jerseys are at stake, the five at elite level include time trials and road races for men and women with a mixed relay too.

The championships get underway with the men's and women's individual time trials on Sunday.

AFP highlights three things to watch out for in Zurich.

– Triple crown –

Pogacar's bid for the road race title, contested over seven laps of Zurich, is the main atraction at these worlds.

The Slovenian skipped the Olympics but is eyeing a rare triple crown on a 273km course that suits him with its short punchy climbs with kicks at 12 percent.

"I'm ready. I feel in good shape again," said the 25-year-old after winning the Montreal GP on Sunday.

If he adds the world title to the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France titles he won earlier in the year, he will join exulted company in Roche from 1987 and Merckx from 1974. Annemiek van

Vlueten achieved the women's triple in 2022.

To do so he will have to outride double Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel, recent Vuelta winner Primoz Roglic and Danish climber Mattias Skjelmose.

Defending champion Mathieu van der Poel of the Netherlands showed astonishing power at last year's worlds in Glasgow and can be counted upon to put up an aggressive defence.

Other riders to watch are Michael Matthews of Australia, Biniam Girmay of Eritrea, or any of the English trio Tom Pidcock, Adam and Simon Yates.

– Mixed relay –

Since the rain-lashed worlds in Yorkshire in 2019, the elite competition has included a mixed relay in a team of six, where the men ride first and the women contest the final leg of a team time trial.

"Sending the women out last allows them to be the stars of the event," said IOC presidency contender David Lappartient when unveiling the new event five yaers ago.

The Swiss team have won the last two events with Germany and the Netherlands also enjoying strong showings.

– Vollering revenge –

Dutch rider Demi Vollering will be itching to get stuck into the road race after admitting she felt "sour" after a fall robbed her of the Tour de France Femmes.

Vollering was comfortably leading the GC when she came off her bike on stage 5.

Although she clambered back on, and went on to win the final stage 8 up the Alpe d'Huez, she missed out on the yellow jersey, beaten by the Pole Katarzyna Niewiadoma, a former

gravel rider, by just four seconds.

That loss hurt and the circuit around Zurich, with three climbs on each of the four laps, is where Vollering, 27, will look to exact some form of payback.

Niewiadoma, 29, has already won a gravel rainbow jersey and could pull another surprise in the road race on September 28.

AFP