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Fontanelli special

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FABIANO Fontanelli was the gem in the Pearl of the Orient when he sprinted to the finishing line to take Stage 11 of the Le Tour de Langkawi from Kangar to Penang yesterday.

The Italian rider of team MG-Technogym clocked four hours 31 minutes and 11 seconds to take the 189.4-kilometre stage followed by Australian Jay Sweet of Giant-AIS three seconds later.

German Martin Weinchezt of Schauff-Oschelbronn came third.

MG-Technogym, an International Cycling Union (UCI) first division team, have been riding high in the 1,613-kilometre Tour since it commenced in Kota Kinabalu last Feb 19.

Fontanelli's teammate, Luca Scinto won the overall leader's yellow jersey for the sixth consecutive time.

However, their other team member Nicola Loda, who has been impressive with his sprints in recent stages, was robbed of his green jersey in yesterday's stage.

The 32-year-old Fontanelli was pleased with himself for having finally attained his target of winning a stage in this year's Tour.

"I had planned to win a stage and was lucky when I had the opportunity to push forward in the final kilometre," said Fontanelli who had seven victories last year.

This was also Fontanelli's first victory after he had to retire in last year's Giro d'Italia in the opening stage from Aulla to Loano after suffering from a hamstring injury.

Fontanelli kept himself ahead in the main pack throughout the race which was led by Roland Green (Canada) and Britain's Brian Smith until after the Penang Bridge.

The Italian then sprinted ahead to lead the peloton and was about three seconds ahead of the pack when he crossed the finish line.

Schauff-Oschelbronn's Heinrich Trumheller retained the King of the Mountain's red jersey for the second time after the German stole it from Britain's Matthew Postle in Stage 10 from Jeli to Grik on Friday.

Kazakstan's Serguei Lavranenko still leads the Asian field in the orange jersey for the sixth consecutive time.

M. Kumaresan was the first Malaysian rider to arrive at the finishing line near Padang Kota at number 32 followed by Tsen Seong Hoong (76), Suhaimi Keton (78), Azizan Manaf (97) and Wong Ah Thiam (101).

The Tour will continue with its twelfth and final stage with a round island 60.5 kilometre race in Langkawi today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to close the event and give away prizes totalling RM1.3 million to the winners.

The Le Tour de Langkawi, which was graded a 2.5 event by the UCI this year, is the world's third richest racing event in prize money terms.