



FROM LEFT: Ali bin Daud, Stefanie Treiv, Nasser al Hashar and Hilal al Sinani at the press conference. — ONA Pictures



## 'Dune-Up Oman-08' biathlon begins

By Ali Ahmed al Riyami

MUSCAT — The first ever Dune-Up Oman 2008 biathlon endurance race that is being held in association with McDonalds and Coca-Cola, is set to commence today, it was announced at a press meet held at McDonalds in the Capital Commercial Centre (CCC) yesterday.

Addressing the media personnel was a panel made up of Stefanie Treiv, Event Co-ordinator, Ali bin Daud, President of McDonalds — Oman, Hilal al Sinani, General Secretary of the Oman Olympic Committee, Nasser bin Saeed al Hashar of the Al Hashar Group of Companies, Susanne Beisenherz (pictured), competitor and World Champion of the 2007 Triple and Double Iron, as well as the winner of the RAK Ultra Triathlon (Dubai) 2007 and Dr Jan Brommundt.

It was noted that one of the reasons Oman has been selected to host the race, which is set to become an annually held competition here, is because of the country's impressive terrain that will really challenge the capabilities of the 23 participants who are taking up the challenge. Of the 23 competitors — from Switzerland, England, Germany and Poland — three are female, including the World Championship holder.

The convoy left Muscat yesterday for Wadi Bani Auf where they set up camp and are beginning the first leg of their 5-day marathon today. Today's test is the commencement of the 100-km 'Mountain-bike Altitude



Challenge', beginning at 8 am from Al Awabi to the Sharaf al Alamayn plateau and then down to Nizwa, where they will spend the night at the Jebal Shams' Treasure Box Resort.

Tomorrow, on their second leg, will be the competitors' first sand dune encounter, where they are to begin with an afternoon warm-up run over the sand dunes of Al Rimal al Sharqiyah for 'The Wahiba Sands Endurance Track' before they retire overnight at their desert camp.

On Tuesday, in the third leg of the race, they face the first part of the 'Desert Endurance Trail', which is from Qihayd to Al Qabil — a total run of some 120-km from north to south, across the Eastern Sands.

Here the competitors begin a gruelling 40-kilometre marathon race that is made nearly three times more difficult as it is run over soft sand rather than the usual tarmac.

They again spend a scheduled overnight desert camp stay before commencing the second part of the trail (on Wednesday) that again takes

them on a 40-km desert run. The final leg will be on Thursday, where they complete the Desert Endurance Trail to the finish line. Here they run another arduous 40-km desert race to the finish, ending up at the Raha Tourist Camp before transferring back to Muscat the following day.

Dune-Up is an extreme sports event equivalent to three regular marathons. Although it is not considered a race in the normal sense of the word, it places high demands on the physical and mental stamina of participants. They are required to stand up to the extreme heat, wind and the uncertainty about desert tracks, testing the athletes to the utmost limits of their abilities.

The competitions' main aim is for participants to reach the final camp without assistance. Participants who are unable to keep up with the pace of the group have to give up and can take advantage of the service cars that follow runners.

Besides the service cars, a flying doctor is on call throughout the event to deal with any health-related emergencies that may occur.

The previously held Dune-Up was in Tunisia and, after Dune-Up Oman 2008, the next one to be held will be in China, along the country's Great Wall.

Sponsors of Dune-Up Oman 2008 include, the Ministry of Tourism, Al Raha Tourist Camp, NBO and Al Hashar, with support from the Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Information.