

Slovenia's Tadej Pogačar produced a display of strength and audacity to win the men's elite road race at the UCI World Championships in Kigali, Rwanda, retaining his title after a decisive long-distance attack.

The 25-year-old had an unusual start, briefly pulling over in the opening kilometres to take a toilet break, a moment that underlined his composure. But once the climbs began, there was no sign of hesitation. His decisive move came on Mont Kigali with more than 100 kilometres still to ride. Only Mexico's Isaac del Toro managed to follow briefly, before being dropped with 66km to go. From then on, Pogačar rode the rest of the race alone, cheered every lap by vast crowds lining the circuit.

He finished one minute and 28 seconds clear of Belgium's Remco Evenepoel, who endured two bike changes after striking a pothole, but fought back to claim silver. Ireland's Ben Healy sealed bronze, dropping Denmark's Mattias Skjelmose on the final ascent.

Tens of thousands of fans turned out for Africa's first World Championships, lining the Mur de Kigali and the Côte de Kimihurara with drums, flags and chants. The carnival-like atmosphere peaked as Pogačar crested the climbs alone, his lead growing with every lap.

At the finish, Rwanda's President Paul Kagame awarded him the rainbow jersey and gold medal, marking a symbolic moment in the host nation's sporting history.

The 16-lap course, with nearly 5,500 metres of climbing, proved one of the toughest in World Championships history. Early attacks never gained much ground, while high-profile names including Julian Alaphilippe, Michael Matthews and Egan Bernal abandoned under the strain.

Evenepoel, the world time trial champion, saw his hopes suffer when forced into two bike changes. Despite clawing back time with a spirited chase, the Belgian could not close the gap on the lone leader.

Pogačar became only the eighth rider to defend a men's world title, adding to his four Tour de France victories.

"It was so hard, the last laps," he said. "Of course you doubt, but you have to push through. I'm so happy I made it. It was an incredible experience, I'm happy I won't

be change a jersey again,"

For Rwanda, the sight of Pogačar celebrating in front of jubilant crowds and receiving his medal from President Kagame ensured this edition of the World Championships will be remembered as historic. For Africa, hosting the world's best riders on such a demanding course, where only 30 riders finished , marked a milestone that will resonate far beyond cycling.