

Newlyweds Celebrate With A Win

Newlyweds Richard and Elina Ussher racked up what is sure to be the first of many husband and wife wins when they totally dominated one of New Zealand's premier multisport races, Wellington's Kathmandu Crazyman.

Almost 500 entrants turned out for the 2007 Kathmandu Crazyman, a 66k kayak, running and mountain bike event around the icon outdoor elements of Wellington's Hutt City.

Two time multisport and adventure racing world champion Richard Ussher (below) and Finnish adventure racing ace Elina Maki-Rautila were back to defend their titles over Hutt City's scenic but savage terrain. Ussher, a former Wellingtonian, won the Kathmandu Crazyman back in 2000, then again in 2006 when Elina Maki-Rautila also won the women's race. But after disappointing showings at this year's Speights Coast to Coast they both returned to the Capital determined to re-establish themselves as New Zealand's number one man and woman. But they also returned as newly-weds, and quickly illustrated that they are New Zealand's number one couple.



In the 2006 Kathmandu Crazyman the Usshers both beat the eventual winners in this year's Speight's Coast to Coast. Auckland's Gordon Walker and Wellington's own Fleur Pawsey both finished third here last year before going on to upset the favourites at the Coast to Coast. The Ussher's were keen to turn the tables at the Crazyman, but in a twist of fate Walker was a late withdrawal and Pawsey failed to finish the race.

For Pawsey this year's Kathmandu Crazyman was the first real test after her surprise Coast to Coast victory. But just a kilometre after the kayak start on Petone Foreshore she found herself on the beach frantically trying to fix a broken rudder system. She couldn't, and with no rudder to help her in Wellington Harbour's northerly swell, the big rematch was over almost before it had started.

Despite the withdrawal of her co-favourite, Mrs Ussher wasn't doing it easy as little known Sophie Hart stayed in close attendance all day. Hart, a Whakatane native and first year doctor in Wellington, has made a habit of winning shorter races in the upper North Island. She has also won the Coast to Coast's Two Day event, and a month before the Kathmandu

Crazyman she was a close second to Fleur Pawsey in the Porirua Grand Traverse.

At the Kathmandu Crazyman, Hart was hovering all day, not quite able to reel Ussher in, but staying close enough to take advantage of any mistakes she might make. But the defending champion didn't make any. She opened up a four minute lead in the 12k kayak from Petone to Eastbourne, but Hart pulled back almost two minutes on the tough 18k mountain run over the Eastern Harbour Regional Park and Mt Lowry to establish what should have been a tight race. But Ussher was too strong on the brutal 34k mountain bike leg along the Hutt Skyline and down the Hutt River Trail and she romped away to an 11 minute win.

Finishing 12th overall, Ussher's time of 5hrs 05min 35secs smashed her own race record from last year by a massive 25min. "It was a good race," the Finnish adventure racing ace said. "The weather this year was much nicer and I felt good. It was hard, it is a very hard course, but it felt good."

First to greet Mrs Ussher when she crossed the line was a grinning Mr Ussher, who like his wife had made short work of what was meant to be a closely fought race with German-turned-Kiwi Marcel Hagener, who had finished just a minute behind Ussher in 2005.

This year both men went faster, but Ussher was untouchable. The defending champion established a lead on the opening kayak section. Hagener was quicker through transition, but Ussher extended his lead to almost eight minutes on the 18k mountain run. Hagener, a former professional cyclist was expected to pull back time on the mountain bike. But in one of his most impressive performances ever Ussher continued to pull away, and eventually stopped the clock in 4hrs 09min 24secs to slash 20min from his race record of last year. In second place Hagener also broke Ussher's old record, but trailed a massive 16min behind.

Ussher was as impressed as anyone, with his win coming a after a week of cycle racing in a 1000k South Island tour.

"Actually, I was looking forward to support crewing Elina," he said after the Kathmandu Crazyman win. "But I felt ok the day before the race so thought I'd see how it went.

Obviously it went well!

