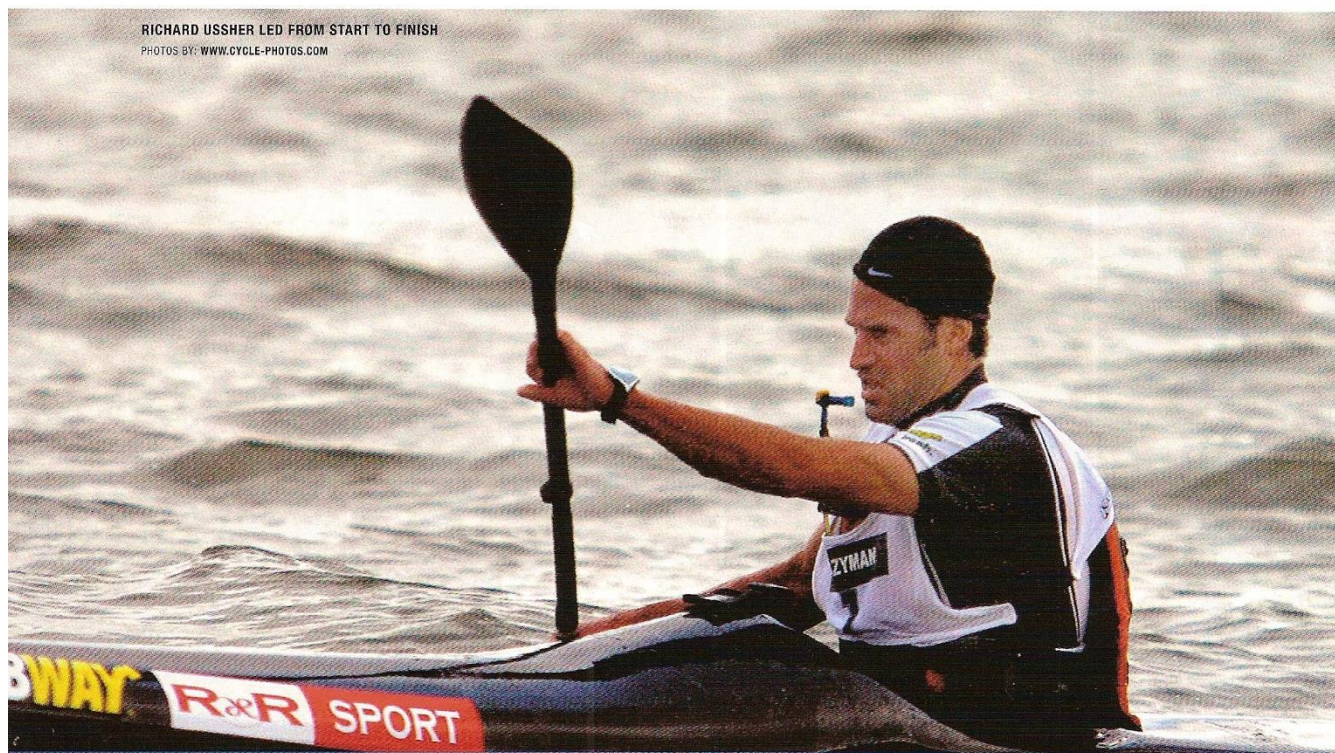


RICHARD USSHER LED FROM START TO FINISH
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CRAZYMAN 2008 — CHAMPIONS AND CHANGE IN THE HUTT VALLEY

BY MICHAEL JACQUES

NELSON'S RICHARD USSHER CONFIRMED HIS CLASS AND ROTORUA'S KATRINE LAWTON ANNOUNCED HER ARRIVAL AS BOTH SCORED COMFORTABLE WINS IN LOWER HUTT'S HUTTVALLEYNZ.COM CRAZYMAN.

For Ussher it was a return to old stomping grounds. Nowadays the born and bred Wellingtonian calls Nelson home, but he returned again this year to win the annual event for the third year in a row. The reigning world champion lined up on Petone foreshore not entirely sure how he might go.

After a busy summer that included his third world title at the Speight's Coast to Coast and then an incredible seventh place at Ironman New Zealand only a month later, Ussher wisely took a break. He came to the Crazyman with only a few weeks training under his belt, but with an impressive 'catch-me-if-you-can' performance, Ussher left a quality line-up that included former world title runner-up Neil Gellatly and up and top Aussie Jarad Kohlar wondering what they have to do to beat the world number one.

The 31-year-old took no prisoners from the start, a testing kayak section across Wellington Harbour to Eastbourne. In the face of a rising southerly front organisers

waited until the last minute before deciding whether to run the 13km paddle across Wellington Harbour, or go to their bad weather alternative. Taking advice from their surf rescue crews and from Wellington Airport weather updates they decided there was enough of a window before the weather came in. It turned out to be the right decision and proved popular.

'Full credit to the organisers for having the balls to run the kayak leg,' said Ussher after the race. 'The conditions were testing, but it was a good challenge and not dangerous.'

Ussher, of course, was upbeat following a kayak leg that surprised even himself. After a fast start he managed to slip away within the top team paddler, New Zealand kayak rep Sam Blyde. The two shared pace duties and eventually surfed into Eastbourne Beach almost three minutes clear of a chase bunch that included Kohlar, Gellatly and New Plymouth's Anthony Roebuck.

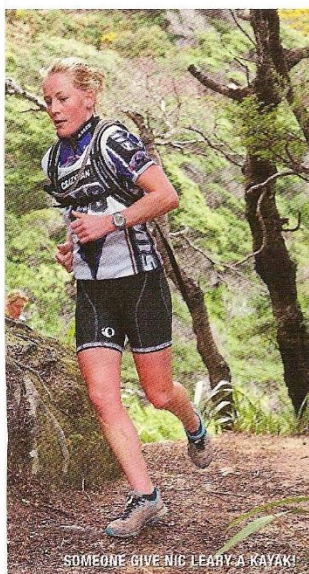
Ussher wasted no time transitioning to

the following 18km mountain run over the Eastern Harbour Ranges. Behind him the Australian was quick to give chase, breaking away from Gellatly and Roebuck and taking time out of Ussher early in the run.

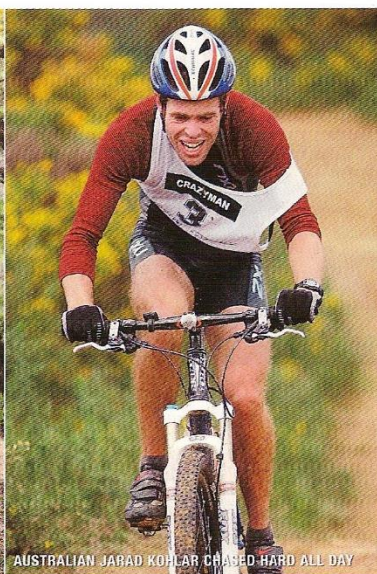
Jarad Kohlar, still just 24, first came to notice on the world scene at the Speight's Coast to Coast in 2003 when he led the field during the mountain run. 'Ussher said at the Crazyman, 'Jarad is very good on the downhills and the technical stuff but I think I'm probably stronger on the uphills.'

And that's how it turned out, with Kohlar taking time out of Ussher through Butterfly Creek and the downhill out of McKenzie Track, only to lose significant time on the long climb up Mt Lowry. Ussher appeared more at home in the slippery conditions too, and when they transitioned from running shoes to mountain bikes the New Zealander had added another three minutes to his lead.

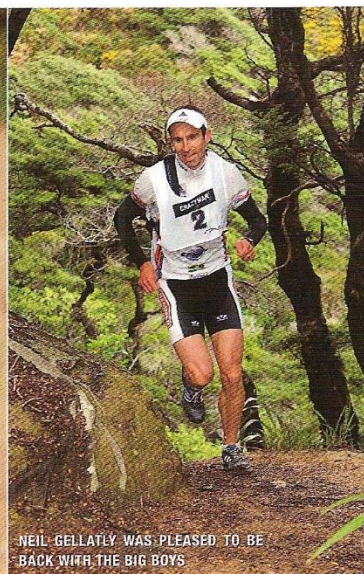
Another person revelling in the conditions was Rotorua fire-fighter Katrine Lawton. The



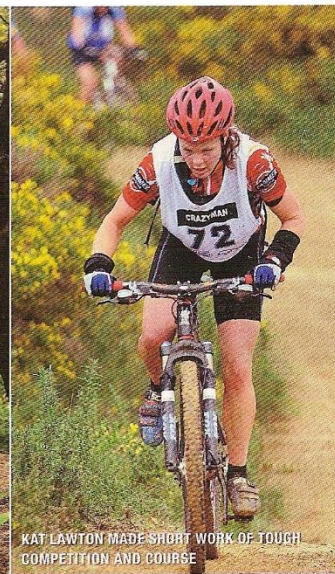
SOMEONE GIVE NIC LEARY A KAYAK!



AUSTRALIAN JARAD KOHLAR CHASED HARD ALL DAY



NEIL GELLATLY WAS PLEASED TO BE BACK WITH THE BIG BOYS



KAT LAWTON MADE SHORT WORK OF TOUGH COMPETITION AND COURSE

mountain bike specialist came into the race as an outside bet to challenge defending Crazyman champion Elina Ussher and world title runner up Fleur Pawsey. On the day illness reduced Ussher to support crew duties for husband Richard, but Lawton put up an impressive performance that had onlookers wondering if she might be the next big thing on the women's scene.

In testing conditions Lawton surprised her competition and spectators alike by opening up a three-minute lead on Pawsey in the opening kayak leg. 'I really enjoyed the kayak,' she said later. 'It was really test of your skills.'

But an even bigger surprise was Pawsey failing to fire in her specialist run section, which saw Lawton start her specialist mountain bike section with an unassailable six-minute lead.

'I spent the whole run sort of looking back waiting for Fleur or someone to catch me,' said Lawton of her weakest discipline.

Pawsey, unfortunately, was suffering the combined misfortune of having her legs desert her after too much recent racing when Lawton decided to have the race of her life. On the final mountain bike section, however, Lawton proved even stronger.

As one of the top half dozen female mountain bike racers in the country, Lawton was expected to shine in this discipline, but the way the winner rode the Hutt Skyline surprised even herself because no one could have predicted her eventual half hour winning margin.

Lawton rode across the Lower Hutt Town Hall finish line in 5hrs 19min 31secs. Pawsey followed in 5hrs 56min 39secs, a tad bemused by her continued bad luck in her hometown race. Despite winning the Coast to Coast world title in 2007 and finishing runner up in the same race earlier this year, the Wellingtonian has yet to win her region's premier race.

Not so Richard Ussher. Way back in 2000 the Crazyman was Ussher's first major win and this year he was looking for his fourth title. The former Olympic skier is noted for how often he is willing to put his reputation on the line, and this year's HuttValleyNZ.com Crazyman was no different.

Jarad Kohlar tried hard, charging through the 36km mountain bike ride along the Hutt Skyline and down the Hutt River Trail to cut three minutes from Ussher's lead. But after maintaining his lead despite two punctures, Ussher was content to keep an eye out behind him while enjoying the final few kilometres of his third straight Crazyman win. He eventually finished just over two minutes clear of Kohlar in 4hrs 27min 11secs, with Neil Gellatly 12min back in third.

Ussher was pleasantly surprised about the first race of his winter campaign. 'I really wasn't sure how it would go, and with such a good field I knew I had to keep an eye out. But I was really surprised how well the kayak went because I've hardly been in the boat since the Coast to Coast almost three months ago. The run and mountain bike were a bit tough, and a couple of punctures didn't help. But it worked out ok.'

Kohlar was upbeat despite chasing Ussher all day. 'He got away at the start of the kayak and I just couldn't catch him again,' he said. 'But Richard's the best in the world right now and no one in New Zealand can touch him, so I feel pretty good about staying so close.'

Kohlar was also keen to return. 'It was an awesome race. We don't have anything like this at home. We have some good races, but nothing so tough and rugged. I'd love to come back, and maybe bring a few others with me.'

For Gellatly it was a welcome return to top racing. The former world title runner up has had a couple of quiet years and re-emerged at the HuttValley.com Crazyman to show he's still a contender. Behind him New Plymouth

kayak specialist Anthony Roebuck headed a close battle for the minor placings ahead of Cameron Durno (Wgtn), Hamish Robb (Q'town) and former Crazyman winner Jason Brown (Lower Hutt).

In other highlights, popular veteran Dave Hicks finished ninth overall while claiming the battle of the old-boys, while local legend Jo Holden was first Masters Women (50+) while claiming third female overall. Richard Ussher's class was shown in the fact that he beat the top multisport teams, which was won by Wild About Kayaks of Steve Hoffmans, Paul Verrec and Simon Pole. The winning women's team held up their end, however, with Mary-Ann Archer, Sally Anderson and Helen Anderson leading the team race all the way and managing to finish four minutes ahead of individual winner Kat Lawton.

The accompanying mountain bike duathlon option also saw a class field. Former New Zealand duathlon rep Dave Rowlands held off New Zealand mountain bike rep Mark Leishman to break his own course record with 3hrs 10min 11secs. Leishman's partner Nic Leary made it a good day for their Palmerston North household by winning the woman's duathlon in 3hrs 51min 52secs. Further back in the field Lower Hutt Mayor David Ogden proved once again to be the New Zealand's fittest city leader by anchoring a team of local luminaries fittingly entitled 'Inconvenient Ones'.

Almost 450 entrants turned out for the 18th annual HuttValleyNZ.com Crazyman, making it the third biggest multisport event in New Zealand behind only the Coast to Coast and the Bay of Plenty's Motu Challenge. Next year's 19th annual HuttValleyNZ.com Crazyman is marked down for Saturday May 2, 2009. For details see: www.crazyman.co.nz.