

Crazyman Closing in on Third Decade

Wellington's premier multisport race continues to evolve, with 2017 bringing twice as much Crazy with race day coming twice in the one year.



Crazyman start 1995.

Established in 1991, the Crazyman is Wellington's longest-running multisport event. While other races come and go this kayak, mountain bike and trail run across the Hutt Valley is one of only a handful of events that have been a multisport mainstay for a quarter century or more.

A lot can happen to a sport in 25 years, and even more can happen to an event. But through good times and bad, the Crazyman has stayed true to its origins. That hasn't changed. On 7th May in 2017, the Crazyman held its 27th edition in near perfect weather. But just seven months later endurance junkies will line up again on December 10th.

After 27 years organisers are moving the Crazyman to December. Event manager, Michael Jacques, says it wasn't something that was taken lightly. The growth of the event industry has meant May ended up making the Crazyman almost the last event of a long season. The growth of the industry also affected team participation in multisport and triathlon events and over the past 10 years the Crazyman had gone from 550 participants to 300-odd.

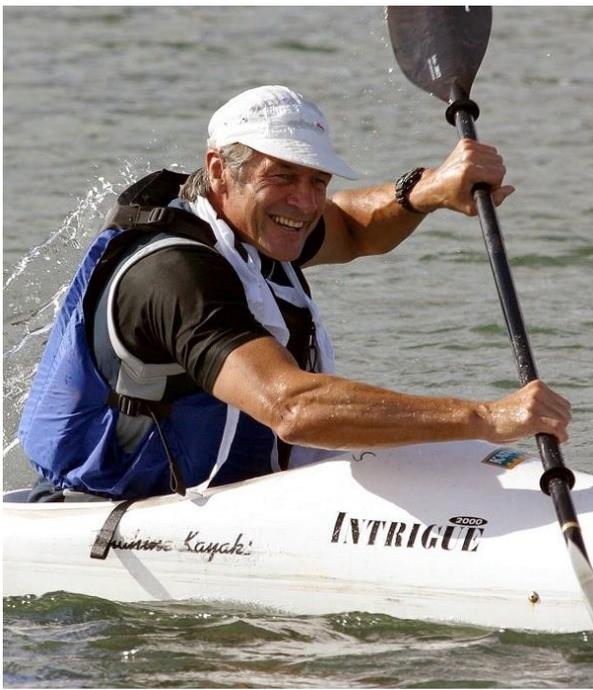
Jacques hopes re-positioning to earlier in the season, when there are less events and people are mentally fresher, might re-invigorate the race. Rather than let 18 months pass between May 2017 and December 2018, he decided to run it again in December 2017.

December lends itself well for athletes building up for February's Coast to Coast. It also separates the Wellington regions two major multisport events, the Crazyman and Porirua Grand Traverse, to create a more year-round scene. And Jacques hope punters will get into the spirit of a Christmas Crazyman.

Nothing else about Wellington's favourite multisport race will change. Designed around Hutt City's icon outdoor elements - the harbour, hills and river - the event has attracted up to 550 starters. Coast to Coast legends Steve Gurney, Kristina Anglem, Jill Westenra, Emily Miazga, Richard and Elina Ussher, Fleur Pawsey, Gordon Walker and Jesse Simson all cut their teeth at the Crazyman.



Steve Gurney won the Crazyman in 1994.



All Black legend Murray Mexted enjoyed it.

Gurney (above) won the event in 1994, but only narrowly from local legends Dave Abbott and Brian Sanders, who had won the Coast to Coast way back in 1985. A year earlier another legend-to-come, 17 year old Kristina Strode-Penny (later Anglem), had triumphed in her very first multisport race, which of course led to world titles in both multisport and adventure racing.

The original race had been won by Lower Hutt legend, Paul Coles, who like Sanders had been around since the first Coast to Coast. Fittingly, Coles was back winning the 50-plus category in 2010's 20th Crazyman.

Other early standouts included Niels Madsen, who finished first in 1992 and third in 1993, was top-10 at Coast to Coast and went on to age group world titles as a veteran triathlete.

In 1998 Lower Hutt's own Jonathan Wyatt illustrated his class as a six-time world mountain running champion when a foray into cross-training saw him win the Crazyman ahead of Coast to Coast top-10 finishers Glenn Muirhead and Michael Jacques.

Similarly, the women's race in 1997 had been a battle between Susy Wood and Penny Edwards, both of whom would go on to represent New Zealand and Wales as cyclists at the Commonwealth Games.

In those days the Crazyman was a two-day, 150k coast to coast and harbour to harbour concept from Lower Hutt across the region to Porirua. Day One was a 16k trail run from Eastbourne over Mt Lowry to Wainuiomata. Then it was onto

mountain bikes for 34k along the Eastern hills and down the Hutt River Trail. A 12k kayak completed Day One, originally down the Hutt River to finish in Petone. But river straightening and reservoir water-hogging eventually saw the kayak shifted to Wellington Harbour.

Day Two started with 19k trail run along Petone Foreshore into Belmont Regional Park. A 54k road cycle took participants west, over the Hayward's Hill and Paikakariki Hill to Porirua where the race finished with an 8k kayak and 8k mountain bike.

At 150k and almost 2000m of climbing, Steve Gurney called it tougher than the two day Coast to Coast. But the toughest part was organising it. The original course encompassed two city councils, two harbour boards, two Police districts, Transit New Zealand, Regional Council and half a dozen private land owners. With almost 100 volunteers, increasingly dangerous roads and increasingly difficult and expensive safety and concession issues, by the turn of the century the event had become unsustainable.

The Crazyman was established by a keen group of local multisporters who decided Wellington needed a Coast to Coast. This was a familiar theme in multisports early years; races like the Mountain to Sea, the North Island Coast to Coast, the Head to Head, the Akitio Challenge and Gold Rush were all inspired by the Coast to Coast and thrived for a while only to disappear for varying reasons. But the Crazyman didn't disappear.

After almost 10 years the Crazyman's original crew of training buddies was gradually disappearing to the usual change of lifestyles, addresses, jobs and sports. In 1996 numbers were up to 350, but by 2000 one person was left handling an event that had become unsustainable at the same time as the local scene was experiencing a lull. Entries were down to around 100 when a former winner stepped in.



Kristina Anglem won in 1993 & 2003.

John Cussins won the Crazyman in 1997. His partner, Paula Stricksen, was one of the founding organisers and in 1999 they both finished second. Cussins knew how hard it was organisationally and worried it might disappear, he and training partner Michael Jacques set out to make the Crazyman more sustainable.

Cussins thought the event was too tough to organise and too tough for beginners. So they cut the second day and made it an iconic outdoor tour of Hutt City. With support from Hutt City Council, the Crazyman became easier to handle and the one-day format made it more accessible to more people. The motto “The Race from Hell” changed to “A Hell of a Challenge” and the reputation of being crazy to take on the Crazyman is now, “you’re Crazy not too”.

To make an annual event successful there needed to be a consistent multisport scene, so Cussins and Jacques organised smaller events at different times of the year. And while it didn’t happen overnight, it did happen. From just over 100 entries in 2000, by 2005 the Crazyman had exploded to more than 500 entries. Coast to Coast champion Richard Ussher won in 2000 and was visibly taken aback when returning to win the much bigger and glossier 2005 event.

Some of the Crazyman’s success was good timing. Between 2001 and 2006 the sport enjoyed unprecedented growth, thanks in part to the Kiwi website sportzhub.com giving the sport a cultural hub. But even today, with multisport being an ironic casualty amidst the growth of the event industry, the Crazyman is still attracting more than 300 participants. This is more than the early to mid-1990s when the Crazyman and multisport was enjoying its first big boom.



The Crazyman remains an old-school challenge.



John Cussins was a Crazyman winner & organiser

After 27 years the Crazyman now has a permanent place as central New Zealand’s premier multisport event and the shift to December is just a continuation of an event willing to refine, develop and adapt to its region and the sport.

Since 2012 the Crazyman has been raced over an entirely new route. Increasing landowner and health and safety issues forced Jacques and Cussins to change the mountain bike section, which in turn forced them to also change the kayak and run. But the new-look Crazyman is as spectacular as it is challenging.

The new 54k Crazyman opens with a 13k kayak leg from Eastbourne’s Days Bay north Wellington Harbour’s eastern coastline and Petone Foreshore to finish on the Hutt River. Kayaks are swapped for mountain bikes for a 28k ride north up the Hutt River Trail to Dry Creek where they head west into Belmont Regional Park, riding over Boulder Hill past World War II ammunition bunkers to the historical Woolshed behind Maungarakei. Then it’s into running shoes for the final 13k trail run around Belmont Trig, down the historic Korokoro Stream and along Petone Foreshore to finish at the iconic Petone Wharf.

The current course is slightly shorter and with less total climbing, but is typically tough. Kayakers still have to handle Wellington’s harbour, but the change in direction makes the

event less likely to be impacted by rough weather. The climb up Boulder Hill is the highest ever and the mountain bike section also includes a tunnel and finishes with half an hour of superb single track. The run through Korokoro Stream is arguably the nicest trail in Wellington and rather than one huge uphill it now has three shorter, steeper, rougher and more remote hills. Current developments at Belmont Park will also see more single track introduced to the mountain bike.

Nationally, the Coast to Coast, Motu Challenge and the Crazyman are the only multisport events that attract truly national fields and the country's top athletes.

Take a look at the history page on www.crazyman.kiwi. The Hall of Fame shows the Crazyman in 2000 as Richard Ussher's first major win after less than a year in the sport. He beat local legend Al Cross, who had won the Crazyman's last two day event in 1999 and would go on to win the 2001 Gold Rush.

Three-time Coast to Coast winner Gordon Walker was another to cut his teeth at the Crazyman, with a win in 2003. Emily Miazga (2004), Jill Westenra (2000) and Elina Ussher (2005, 06, 07 & above) all scored wins at the Crazyman before taking out Coast to Coast titles, while Kristina Anglem took out the Crazyman both before (1993) and after (2003) becoming one of the best female multisporters in history.

Historically, however, it has been the Usshers who have dominated. As of 2015 both Richard and Elina had won the Crazyman five times each, but by May 2017 Elina was up to seven with a new race record at age 40.

But there's been the odd upset too, like Jonathan Wyatt in 1998, former kayaking world champion Andrew Martin in 2001 and mountain biker Katrine Lawton beating Coast to Coast champion Fleur Pawsey in 2008.

Interestingly, other top-five finishers at Coast to Coast like Dwarne Farley, Amanda Peake, Nathan Fa'avae, Luke Osbourne, Dougal Allen, Trevor Voyce and James Coubrough have all won the Crazyman.

First and foremost, however, the Crazyman is a community event embracing all age, ability and backgrounds from school kids, house wives and corporates to tradesmen and retirees - some experienced endurance athletes, some relative rookies looking for a new challenge.

And if the full 54k seems too daunting, the popular duathlon option caters for non-kayakers and team options include popular corporate and school categories.



7-time winner Elina Ussher.

Fittingly 2015's 25th anniversary event saw the youngest ever finisher of the feature multisport race in 14-year-old Nelsonian Cameron Jones.

In 2012 Lower Hutt's John Wood had become the eldest ever finisher at age 74. Fifteen years earlier he had support crewed his teenage daughter Susy to a win in the women's race.

Similarly, original race organiser, Dave Rudge, is a regular participant almost three decades later. And while current organiser Michael Jacques has been at all 27 events either racing, support crewing or organising, local stalwart Les Morris is the only person to have raced every Crazyman.

Another fitting landmark for the event was 2017's last race in May, when local sign writers Fine Signs - who had been a minor sponsor and participants in the event since the late-90s - stepped up to the top spot as the principal sponsor of the "Fine Signs Crazyman".

To date, just over 10,000 people have experienced everything that is the Fine Signs Crazyman and they'll no doubt be back in December. And rather than being crazy, they'll tell you that you'd be crazy not to.



Still Wgtn's favourite multisport event.