

Fa'avae Celebrates 20th Year in 20th Crazyman

Nelson's Nathan Fa'avae celebrated his 20th year in multisport with a win at the 20th anniversary Hutt City Crazyman.

Almost 400 endurance junkies from all ends of New Zealand lined up in Lower Hutt this weekend for the 20th HuttValleyNZ.com Crazyman. And Fa'avae added his name to the long list of multisport stars who have won Wellington's premier multisport event since its inception two decades ago.



Established in 1991, the list of past winners is like a who's-who of the sport: world champions such as Richard Ussher, Jill Westenra, Gordon Walker, Emily Miazga, Elina Ussher, Kristina Anglem, Alex Stewart and Steve Gurney have all won the annual Lower Hutt event. Fa'avae, a former adventure racing world champion, led from start to finish to add his name to that illustrious roll call with a comfortable win in what is also his 20th year in the sport.

The 37 year old Nelsonian first burst on to the scene in the 1991 Speight's Coast to Coast when as a 17 year old he led the Two Day race through the first day before slipping to 12th courtesy of a home-made kayak. Since then he has gone on to be one of the world's best multisporters and adventure racers, but despite world titles

and wins aplenty he had never taken on the hills and harbour of Wellington's Crazyman event.

Wellington threw up four seasons in a day for the 20th year of the kayak, run and mountain bike race. The anniversary event started on a glassy harbour under blue skies as kayakers headed from Petone Foreshore across to Eastbourne 13k away. Out on Cook Strait a southerly front was waiting patiently, but Fa'avae was waiting for no one as he followed the top teams to lead the individual race off the water four minutes ahead of Wellington's Michael O'Conner.

Fa'avae appeared comfortable on the savagely scenic 18k mountain run over the Eastern Harbour Regional Park and Mt Lowry to Wainuiomata. But behind him fellow Nelsonian Dan Moore was racking up the fastest run to move from fourth to second, just 90secs behind the race favourite as they started the final 36k mountain bike.

Fa'avae, however, is a mountain bike specialist. After his baptism of fire into multisport in 1991's Speight's Coast to Coast, he took to cycling and eventually raced mountain bikes internationally. That experience served him well on the tough 36k course through Wainuiomata mountain bike park, along the Hutt Skyline and down the Hutt River Trail. When he eventually stopped the clock outside the Lower Hutt Town Hall in 4hrs 35min, it kept ticking for another 21min before a torrid battle for second place that saw Wellington's Lee Campbell outspurt Moore for second place by three seconds.

The women's race was similarly dominated by Wellington's Rachel Ockleford (at right), although she first had to

overcome a spirited start from fellow Wellingtonian Heather Kirkham. After the kayak across Wellington's eastern harbour bays, Kirkham held a two and a half minute advantage. But after the mountain run Ockleford had turned that into a five minute lead and with mountain biking being her best discipline she eventually crossed the line with more than half an hour to spare in 5hrs 44min.



In other racing New Zealand mountain bike number two, Brendon Sharratt dominated the duathlon option in 3hrs 24min 24secs, while Christchurch-based Swede Sia Svendsen dominated the women's duathlon in 3hrs 53min 43secs. Among teams Wellingtonians Marianne Archer, Sally and Helen Anderson were the highlight, dominating the women's team race for the fourth year in a row in 5hrs 03min 41secs. Favourites Glen Muirhead, James Coubrough and Julian McPike dominated the men's teams in 4hrs 10min 20secs, with Coubrough breaking the run course record with 1hr 12min 31secs.

While Fa'avae and co were impressive in winning their respective races, further back in the field Wellington's Paul Coles was celebrating something more personal. Coles won the very first Crazyman in 1991 and the 55 year old returned two decades later to mark the occasion by finishing the 20th anniversary Crazyman.

In those days the Crazyman was a two-day event. It started in Eastbourne with a 16k bush run over the Eastern Harbour Regional Park to Wainuiomata. Then they took to mountain bikes for a 30k ride up onto the Eastern Hutt Hills and down to the Hutt River for a 10k paddle to the finish in Petone.

The second day started again with another 16k run along Petone Foreshore and through Belmont Regional Park. Then they took to road bikes for a 56k ride over the Haywards Hill and Paekakariki Hill around to Porirua Harbour for a 10k paddle before finishing with an 8k mountain bike on Whitireia Park to finish in Onepoto.

It was marketed as "The Race from Hell". In 1994 multisport and adventure racing legend Steve Gurney won it and claimed

it was tougher than the Two Day Coast to Coast. He won that year ahead of local legends Dave Abbott and Brian Sanders. Sanders had won the Coast to Coast way back in 1985, but the Crazyman would become a bleeding ground for stars of the future.

In 2000 former Olympic skier-turned-mountain biker, Richard Ussher, took his first major win at the Crazyman, ahead of top local Al Cross. Ussher, of course, has gone on to win pretty much every major multisport and adventure race in the world, including the Coast to Coast three times. He has won the Crazyman four times in total and now holds the course record (4:09:24), which many believe will never be broken.

Ussher's wife, Finnish-born Elina Ussher, also holds the women's record (5:05:35) and won the Crazyman three times prior to winning the 2010 Coast to Coast. Likewise Canadian Emily Miazga and Auckland's Gordon Walker won the 2004 and 2003 Crazyman races prior to their three Coast to Coast titles.

Others to feature at the Crazyman prior to greater things include four time Coast to Coast

champion Jill Westenra, and Coast to Coast and world adventure racing champion Kristina Strode-Penny. But it was also a race for local stars.

Other champions of interest included six-time world mountain running champion Jonathan Wyatt, who won the 1998 Crazyman, and wild water kayak world champion Andrew Martin, who won the 2001 Crazyman.

Al Cross and John Cussins, who both live just a few blocks from the Lower Hutt course, established local legend status at the Crazyman. Cross has won the race three times and finished second four times, while Cussins is the only person with a complete set of first, second and third, not to mention winning the veterans title for three years in a row.

In 2010 both Cross and Cussins were among the 20th anniversary action, but behind the scenes. Cussins now organises the event with long-time training partner Michael Jacques, while Cross this year marked out the tough Mt Lowry run course.

Nathan Fa'avae (right)



