

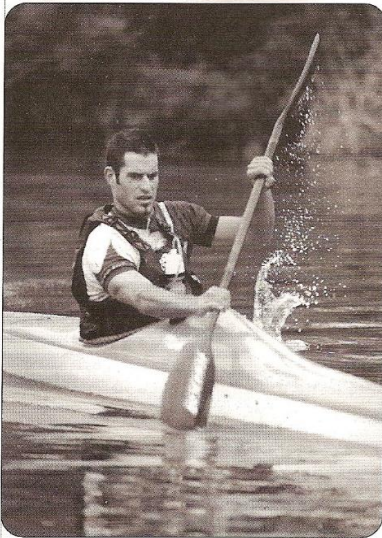
at the races

'Usshering' in a New Era

Michael Jacques

If Wellington's Richard Ussher has his way, he'll be the next winner of the Speight's Coast to Coast. And if his win in Wellington's Crazyman event is any indication, then he certainly has the talent to match his enthusiasm.

Somewhat of a rookie, Ussher has only stumbled upon multisport in the past eight months. However as a former international skier with 1996 Olympic representation to his credit, the 24-year-old had transferred his obvious talent to endurance sports. He won his first ever race, December's prestigious Pub to Pub event from the Wairarapa to Waikanae, then found out how tough Coast to Coast is when placing ninth despite suffering severe cramps on the run during the two-day race. Now following a 15-minute win in the Crazyman, Wellington's premier multisport race, locals are



Richard Ussher took out the Crazyman and second in the Wellington Du in one weekend.

picking Ussher as an early darkhorse for February's Coast to Coast.

Facing defending champion Al Cross, back in competition following a dislocated shoulder during November's Southern Traverse, Ussher illustrated an all-round ability that could well make him the danger man at Coast to Coast. In the opening 16km run over the steep tracks between Eastbourne and Wainuiomata, he opened up a three minute lead to scream into the run/mountain bike transition in third place over all. First was 49-year-old mountain running legend Barry Prosser, who put his Johnsonville Cycles Vets team into an overall lead that they would never relinquish.

Once on the mountain bike, Ussher wasted no time in moving into second overall. However, not far behind, and closing fast, was Al Cross. Or at least he was closing fast, until his chain broke. The muddy four-wheel drive tracks took a heavy toll on chains this year, with Cross one of several unlucky riders. Of course, a broken chain

doesn't necessarily mean you're out of the race, unless your chain breaker breaks as well, which effectively ended Al Cross' race.

While the defending champion stood in the wind and rain for 25 minutes until another rider stopped to help, Richard Ussher was steaming toward the Hutt Riverbank transition. With plenty of time in hand, he had only to cruise through the 15km kayak for the win.

Behind the winner, Al Cross put his mountain bike frustrations to good effect when powering his borrowed JJK UFO to fastest paddle time, while Alana Joe, another multisport rookie, took out the Crazy'wo'man section. However, wearing a huge grin from start to finish, Alana obviously thought her new found sport was anything but crazy.

Cleugh takes Broad Bay title

Wayne Parsons

The 5km kayak is easy, but the 15km mtb followed by a 5km cross-country run are something else when it comes to the Broad Bay Multi-sport endurance race.

However new boy to the sport, Duncan Cleugh, was far from deterred, even after last year's effort that left him in seventh place, and among other injuries, the effects of a recent broken wrist he suffered after crashing out of the Coast to Coast earlier in the year.

The 29 year-old beef farmer from Gimmerburn, was initiated into the sport at the 1999 Ghost to Ghost and can't shake the bug from his system. And this year's Broad Bay event was his first race since and also offered the first opportunity to race his new Opus.

However, he met with tough competition on the water, completing the 5km course in 25:18 and beaching in 8th place, behind national junior canoeist of the year, Carl Barnes and national development squad member Jon Hibert, both paddling K1's.

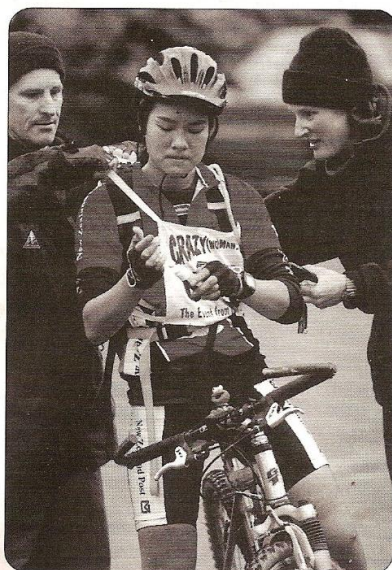
Allowing Barnes a 2:09 lead on the transition to the 15km mountain bike, Cleugh was quick to make amends taking over the lead from Simon Abbott just going into the gruelling 5km cross-country run to record a time of 1:32:23 for the 5km kayak, 15km mountain bike, 5km cross-country run course.

"The whole race was really challenging," he said. "Especially the run with its steep native bush section where you're clinging on to a cable for support. And then a lot of hands and knees stuff."

Second home was Simon Abbott, who after coming off the kayak section in ninth place was quick to take over the lead on the biking section, before Cleugh took over on the cross-country run. Abbott for second place recorded 1:34:07. While last year's runner up Jeff Richardson was third in 1:35:26.

Jane Nicol impressed in winning the open women's section in 2:20:19, despite taking a wrong turn on the biking section and having to double back.

Colin Clearwater showed he is over his calf muscle injury when he took out the honours in the tag team category in a time of 1:31:51 just ten seconds clear from second placed Bob Norton, with Brendon Haig third in 1:36:02.



Alana Jo and crew at Crazyman.