

Upsets Capture Crazyman

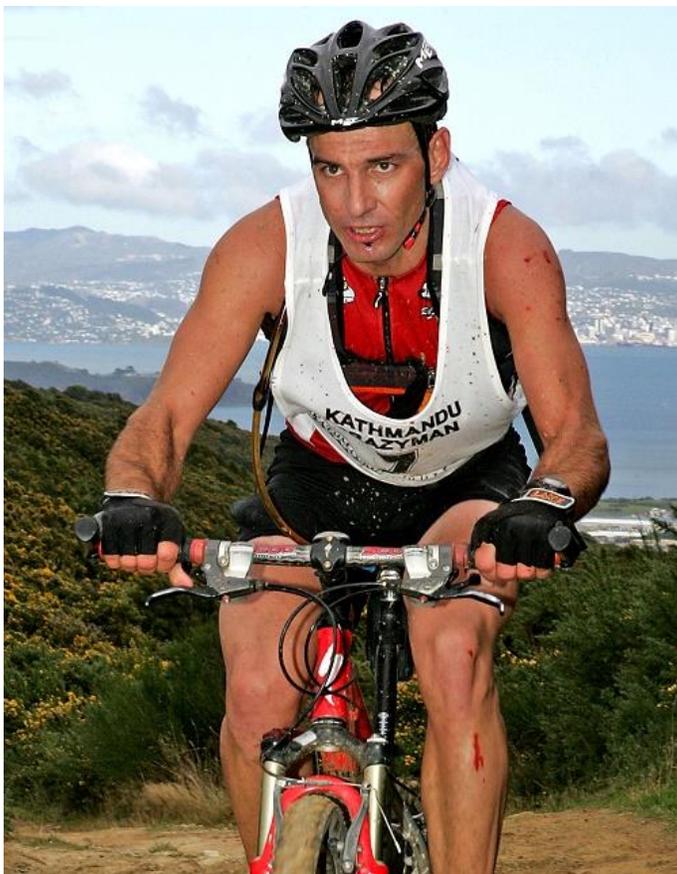
Upsets winners and classical course changes made for an exciting 66k in the 15th annual Kathmandu Crazyman.

More than 400 endurance junkies lined up on Petone Foreshore for the 66k tour of the Hutt Valley's icon outdoor elements. Taking in Hutt City's Eastern harbour, the Eastern Harbour Regional Park, the Hutt City Skyline and Hutt River Trail, the 12k kayak, 18k mountain run and 36k mountain bike took competitors on a scenic but savage tour of the icon outdoor elements of Wellington's Hutt City.

Coming into the increasingly popular Wellington region event, local Hutt City resident Al Cross was odds-on favourite to defend his title from last year. Cross had finished second three times and first three times, and while spectators joked that a third place would complete his set the local hero was looking to for a record fourth win. Expected to provide some interest were Mt Maunganui's Dwarne Farley and unknown Australian Jodie Zerbst, but instead the visitors provided fireworks.

Right from the start on Petone foreshore it was the Australian who made the running. The Melbourne native surprised onlookers by matching paddle strokes with the lead teams all the way across the harbour to Eastbourne. Cross followed 90secs behind, with Farley in tow, and while Farley initially gained time on Zerbst on the run over the Eastern Ranges to Wainuiomata, by the time they climbed onto mountain bikes the Australian had a 3min lead.

Dwarne Farley



Zerbst is the latest of a growing ground swell of top Aussie multisporters, but his performance was all the more impressive for the fact that he has only been in the sport for a year. However, the 35 year old isn't a total rookie. As a former age group silver medallist at the world triathlon championships, he was no slug on foot and bike. And with his father being a former Australian kayaking rep and one of the original standout Aussie multisporters in the late 1980s, all of a sudden the surprise race leader didn't seem so surprising.

Zerbst took up multisport a year ago after 10 years out of competitive sport. But he kept fit in that time and with his fathers background in kayaking has wasted no time in matching it with Australia's best multisporters and adventure racers. Just two weeks prior to the Kathmandu Crazyman he had been narrowly beaten by Aussie legend John Jacoby, the three time winners of our own Speights Coast to Coast. Now, as he matched strokes with Wellington's top kayakers, when one of them asked Zerbst if he was any good at running and biking the darkhorse Aussie yelled back, "actually kayaking is my worst thing."

What turned out to be the race leaders worst thing, however, was preparation. Travelling across from Melbourne he relied on borrowed gear from friends of friends and even the race director. The talent was undeniable, his 90min kayak lead coming despite only one paddle in his borrowed UFO, and his 3min lead at the end of the run coming despite a change of borrowed shoes midway because of blisters. On the final mountain bike leg, however, Zerbst's luck finally ran out. Roaring up and down the big dippers along the Hutt Hills Skyline tough mountain bike course he crunched too many gears at once and jammed his chain.

In the panic that ensued, the Aussie extracted the offending chain a tad too vigorously and not long afterward, on the course's biggest climb, the chain broke. Without a chain tool, he waited several minutes until someone stopped to loan a tool and link. By now both Dwarne Farley and Al Cross had come blazing past. Add to this Zerbst's growing cold on the exposed range and the Aussie's race was over.

Showing character, Zerbst eventually cruised to the finish line in a bemused 10th place. Dwarne Farley and Al Cross later intimated they might have been a tad lucky. But Zerbst himself admitted that he learned a valuable lesson involving making your own luck and promised to return next year better prepared.

The best-prepared man on the day turned out to be Dwarne Farley. But only after a spirited fight back from defending champion Al Cross. No one knows the Kathmandu Crazyman better than the local Petone athlete. In the opening kayak both men were surprised by Zerbst's fast start, but taking a flyer through transition Farley chased hard on the first half of the scenic but savage 18k run along Eastbourne's Eastern Harbour range. With just 8k of the run remaining Farley had actually closed to within 40secs of the Australian and could see him as they toiled up Mt Lowry. But on the downhill into the Wainuiomata transition the Aussie proved too fast and nimble,

and until Zerbst's demise on the mountain bike, Farley's challenge appeared over.

Al Cross' bid for his fourth win had appeared over too. Cross, a former winner of the Alexandra GoldRush, has shifted focus recently after qualifying with Wellington's Team Mainly Tramping for the adventure racing world championships on the West Coast later this year. With training having been more endurance than speed based and even including a 24 hour race the previous week, Cross lacked some zing. But when he came off the Hutt Skyline still only 2min behind Farley and with 13k of flat riding still to go, he decided the race wasn't over until it was over.

For his part, Farley is the biggest improver on the national scene in recent years. After a string of minor placings, the Mt Maunganui athlete scored his first win in round two of the Sportzhub.com national series in Auckland's Thermatech Head to Head last December. Racing around the harbour and hills of Hutt City he illustrated an all round ability reminiscent of a Steve Gurney to clinch his second major win, albeit only 32secs ahead of the fast finishing Al Cross.

For Cross it was a case of too little too late. Behind him Alexandra's Hamish Robb made the trip worthwhile with third place just under 10min behind Farley's winning time of 4hrs 40min 47secs for the 66k race. Just 10min behind Robb, Kathmandu Crazyman co-organiser John Cussins nabbed his third veteran win in four years. The Petone postie made up for a calf injury that held him back on the run with superb kayak and mountain bike legs to win by a massive 20min. Eight years ago Cussins was the overall winner here and in 2005 was still good enough for sixth overall in a tight race that saw the top 10 separated by only 30min.

The women also produced a close race, although race favourite Emily Miazga didn't know it at the time. The Christchurch-based Canadian returned to the Kathmandu Crazyman hoping to retain her title from last year. A good third place at the Speights Coast to Coast indicated she had the form and despite reduced training due to injury and work commitments she was confident of going better than 2004. She did go faster, but it wasn't enough.

And that's how it looked to be panning out too, with Miazga leading the ladies race off the water only 15min behind the lead men. A strong run saw her start the mountain bike leg with a 10min lead over Taupo's little known Amanda Peake, but a lack of recent riding would see Miazga's race come unstuck. Unaware of her big lead and struggling to find a rhythm she thought the race was lost when a female team rider came flying past midway through the 36k ride. When Amanda Peake came past on the bike carry section along a stream linking the Hutt Skyline with the Hutt River Trail, Miazga decided third would have to do.

For her part, Amanda Peake flew through the mountain bike leg and arrived at the finish line as surprised with her win as anyone. Stopping the clock at 5hrs 44min she was four minutes clear of the defending champion, who finished just as surprised with her eventual second place. Miazga finished disappointed with letting her mind rule her body, but admitted that the winner was flying and on the day she could not have matched her fast finish.

In other racing at the Kathmandu Crazyman local Hutt Valley trio of Graham Moore, Murray Doughty and Wayne Hiscock won their fifth straight teams title, while former New Zealand duathlon rep Dave Rowlands (Wgtn) was the first finisher overall in the mountain bike duathlon. New Zealand mountain biking number one Rosara Joseph was a late team entrant and the fastest female rider when she replaced her partner after he was knocked off his bike the day before.

Established in 1990, the Crazyman has always been Wellington's premier multisport event. But in recent years it has been even more prominent, growing to almost 500 competitors. In recent years subtle changes to the run and mountain bike legs have added to the event both in regard to scenery and safety, while huge support from Hutt City's Leisure Active unit has increased the profile. This year organisers instituted a long-planned change to the race that saw the kayak shifted from a tame flat-water paddle at the end of the race to a challenging 12k stint from Petone Foreshore around Hutt City's Eastern Bays to Eastbourne to start the race. Competitors and spectators alike agreed that the new format was a winner.

