

Repeat Winners Amid Wild Weather

The 32nd Fine Signs Crazyman was one to remember. Amid the wildest weather the race has been held in, two worthy winners emerged to confirm their Crazyman credentials.

Gale force winds and rain made 2023 the toughest Crazyman on record. So much so that the opening 13k kayak along Wellington's eastern harbour was reduced to 10k within the more sheltered Hutt River.

Coming into the race, 2020 winner Hamish Elliot was pegged as the favourite. But in such fierce conditions, the lightly built Elliot didn't have it easy. Off the water, he trailed in sixth place, 4min behind leader Dan Busch from Nelson. Busch, a previous placegetter at the Crazyman, was a serious threat but once on the bike Elliotts wasted no time in hunting down the field to move into second place behind Blenheim teenager Finn McKenzie.

McKenzie, the national secondary school mountain bike champion, would claim the fastest ride of the day to hold a three-minute lead after the tough 28k ride over the wind-swept Belmont Regional Park. That might have turned the final 13k run over Belmont Trig and down Korokoro Stream to the Petone foreshore finish line into a sprint finish. But McKenzie's support crew weren't as fast as him and he lost a couple of minutes in transition waiting for running shoes.



This played into the hands of the 2020 winner. Elliot is at his best on foot and wasted no time in hitting the front, clocking the days fastest run to eventually win by 4min in 3hrs 20min 25secs.

"That was brutal," admitted Elliot of conditions that saw a few kayakers blown out of boats and off bikes, and visibility on the high points of Belmont Regional Park down to less than 50m. Behind the winner, Finn McKenzie took consolation in a classy second place for one so young, while Nelson's Caleb Hill claimed third in a tight race that saw the first seven men with 25min.

For women's winner, Deb Lynch, there was a hint of deja-vu. In 2017 the former national triathlon rep debuted in multisport on a similar day in the same race. Inexperienced in the kayak in such rough weather, she swam within the first kilometre but recovered to finish second. Fast forward to 2023, however, and she lined up in worse conditions but this time as the defending champion and race favourite.

As if the conditions weren't tough enough, Lynch made it harder on herself by racing a half ironman in Taupo the day before (finishing second in her age group). But she shrugged this off at the Crazyman to lead almost from start to finish, holding a 30sec advantage after the kayak over sometimes adventure racing teammate Kathryn Bunckenberg. Then stretching that out to 6min on the mountain bike. Like Elliot, Lynch is at her best on foot and eventually finished a comfortable winner in 4hrs 19min 41secs, 11min clear of Bunckenberg and fellow Wellingtonian's Amanda Rowe and masters standout Vicky Vertongen.

In other racing, standouts included Lucy Thorburn, the daughter of former NZ marathon champion Dougal Thorburn, setting a new record in the junior womens duathlon to be the first woman and ninth place Duathlete overall.

Among men, Blenheim's Jeremy McKenzie went one better than his son Finn to claim the overall and masters 40-49 duathlon titles.

Established in 1991, the Hutt City Crazyman is one of New Zealand's longest-running multisport races. This year more than 200 athletes from as far afield as Wanaka, Auckland and Australia lined up for the Lower Hutt event.

Two people who have seen it all are Crazyman life members Les Morris and Dave Dellabarca.

Dellabarca, who has been racing the Crazyman since the late-90s, was made a life member this year. While Morris, who prior to this year was the only person to have raced every Crazyman, was made a life member in 2017.

Morris would have been on the line in 2023 if open heart surgery hadn't got in the way. But true to form, he was at the Crazyman again, this time as a marshal directing the event in the right direction.

"People like Les and Dave are what events like the Crazyman are all about," said event manager Michael Jacques. "The conditions were pretty crazy, but they feel like it would be crazy to miss it."

For full results visit: www.crazyman.co.nz/history.

