

## Cross Takes Three

Hometown hero Al Cross triumphed over a strong field to win Wellington's Kathmandu Crazyman for the third time.

Almost 450 endurance entrants from all ends of the country and even Canada, Switzerland and the UK lined up for the 14<sup>th</sup> running of the Capital City's premier multisport event. And with entries having increased by 200% in three years this 63km tour of the Hutt Valley's icon outdoor elements is also one the country's premier events and doubled this year as a round of the Sportzhub.com NZ Multisport Series.

Racing over an 18km mountain run, 33km mountain bike and 12km kayak the field faced icy conditions and a course caked in mud by Wellington's recent southerly storms. As a three-time winner and three-time runner-up in the 14-year-old race, Al Cross admitted that 2004 was the toughest year he could remember. The mud and cold weather made the race hard going he said, "It was really sticky and you had to concentrate much more."



Cross (above) led all the way and clocked in at 4hr 43min 01sec, a time more than 45min slower than his course record in 2002. Strong southerly swells forced organisers to shift the Wellington harbour kayak to a three-lap course on the Hutt River. While disappointed to have his strong leg reduced, Cross said the mud and weather suited him. "It was more of a strength of mind out there, which helped get the greyhounds out of the way early."

Cross came in to the race unsure of his form. Late withdrawals from defending champion Gordon Walker, 2000 winner Richard Ussher and well known Craig Stevens - Ussher and Stevens with injury and Walker due to a personal tragedy - made Cross' task easier. But Cross was almost a late scratching to

injury following Achilles tendon problems of late.

But on a course that features 1500 vertical metres of climbing, Cross led from start to finish, revealing later he was worried about the kayaking ability of former world champion Andrew Martin.

Martin and Wellington's John Cussins were favourites for the veteran title. Both are previous winners of the overall Crazyman race and Cussins was also shooting for his third consecutive veterans win. Martin denied him that, winning in 5hrs 14min 55secs, but he was no match for Cross and eventually settled for third overall 4min behind Nelson's Trevor Voyce.

Injury also robbed the women's race of more interest. Sweden's Sia Svendsen and Canada's Emily Miazga were tipped as contenders for female line honours, but Miazga eventually had things her own way when Svendsen was forced to withdraw after she was hit by a car a week before the event.

The Canadian won by more than 20min, clocking 6hrs 16min 39secs. Following her third place at February's Speights Coast to Coast this latest win moves her up to third place in the Sportzhub.com national series behind Christchurch's Kristina Strode-Penny and Auckland's Joanna Gosse.

Al Cross also made a big move up the national series rankings. With his fourth at the Alexandra Goldrush and first at the Kathmandu Crazyman the Wellingtonian now sits at 13<sup>th</sup>. Wellington's Russell Trotter also shot up the veteran rankings following the Kathmandu Crazyman. Finishing third behind former Andrew Martin and John Cussins, Trotter moves up to fifth spot.

With just one round remaining of the Sportzhub.com National Series leaders are currently Queenstown's Richard Ussher (men), Christchurch's Kristina Strode-Penny (women) and Auckland's Wayne Hodgetts (vet men). The veteran women's race, however, is a three-way tie between North Islander's Lyn Helliwell (Motu winner), and Jenny Green (Tongariro winner) and South

Islander Linda Wright (Goldrush winner).

With the last round of the eight race series being held at the two-day Coromandel Classic the North Island contingent are favoured for last minute upsets to the series rankings. Hodgetts should prevail among veteran men, but with six women within four points the veteran women's series will be there for the taking in the August event. Similarly, Kristina Strode-Penny is comfortably ahead in the women's rankings but the race for second may come down to North Islanders Joanna Gosse and Rachel Cashin who have just four points between them in second and third.

It is the men's race, however, that could prove closest. Richard Ussher has ruled the rankings this year, but the Coromandel race gives little known Aucklander Carl Bevin a shot at the top spot. Bevin is the fastest improving multisporters on the circuit right now. He's also the most prolific racer and while yet to score a major win his string of top 10 placings have left him within reach of the national series title. A win at Coromandel would see him nab the title by just four points.

Scheduled for August 28 the Two-Day Coromandel Classic is the final round of this seasons Sportzhub.com national Series. In September the series once again opens to voting for the multisport community to decide the national series events for the 2004/2005 season.

Emily Miazga

