

The Usshers Sweep 21st Birthday Crazyman

Husband and wife duo Richard and Elina Ussher swept all before them at one of the longest running multisport events on the calendar.

Almost 400 endurance junkies from all ends of New Zealand lined up in Lower Hutt for the 21st Hutt City Crazyman. Established in 1991, the list of past winners is like a who's-who of the sport: world champions such as Ussher, Jill Westenra, Gordon Walker, Emily Miazga, Kristina Anglem, Alex Stewart and Steve Gurney have all won the annual kayak, mountain run and mountain bike event.

Indeed, Richard Ussher first burst on to the scene in the year 2000 Crazyman when the retired Olympic skier surprised top locals such as Al Cross to win the Crazyman after less than six months in the sport. Since then he has gone on to be one of the world's best multisporters and adventure racers, winning five world titles and even featuring in Ironman and Xterra Triathlon.

Wellington threw up a blustery southerly squall on race morning, which forced organisers to implement an alternative kayak section for safety reasons. Normally the event opens with an epic 13k kayak from Petone across Wellington Harbour to Eastbourne. But a southerly squall forced organisers to switch the kayak to the end of the race on a 10k course in the lower reaches of the Hutt River.

The race then got underway as it used to 21 years ago, with multisporters and duathletes starting together on the 18k mountain run over Lower Hutt's Mt Lowry. Since taking to triathlon Ussher's running has become stronger than ever and he trailed only team runner James Richardson, a Canadian who has represented his country at the world mountain running championship.

Richardson clocked in at 1hr 17min, with Ussher just 3min back but a massive 15 minute ahead of last year's Crazyman runner-up, Lee Campbell. Right behind Campbell into transition was Elina Ussher, leading the women's multisport race by a similar margin as her husband and trailing only team runner Tina Harris of Capital Sports Med.

On the 39k mountain bike through Wainuiomata Mountain Bike Park and along the Eastern Hutt Skyline and back down the Hutt River Trail, "Mr Ussher" consolidated his lead without putting himself into trouble. Although a lapse in concentration on a steep drop saw the leader flying over the handlebars and fixing a burst tyre.

With more than 20min in hand Ussher's lead wasn't threatened and five minutes later he was back on the bike cranking out the final 10k down the Hutt River Trail to the final kayak section. One the river he cruised through the two lap 10k course and short ride to the Lower Hutt Town Hall finish line to win in 4hrs 06min 29secs. This was actually 3min faster than Ussher's own race record, but the alternative kayak course is 3k shorter and thus his win was some 10-15min slower than his best form in 2007.

Richard Ussher



While Ussher's fifth win in the Hutt City Crazyman was never in doubt, his total domination of the field was. He finished 32min clear of Lower Hutt's Lee Campbell, who was runner-up for the second year in a row. Third place among men went to Porirua's Martin Leighton, but the third place individual overall was cause for surprise.

Elina Ussher put up one of her best efforts since moving from cross-

country skiing to multisport six years ago. The Finnish-born former multisport world champion won her third Crazyman title, but did so by claiming third overall in a fast 4hrs 46min 18secs to finish 35min clear of Lower Hutt up-and-comer Annabel Ramsey, and only 40min behind husband Richard.

"Mrs Ussher" also owns the Crazyman race record of 5hrs 05min 35secs, set in 2007. But even if the event had been held over the normal kayak course her 2011 effort would have been a new record by some 5min.

In other racing, team standouts included sisters Helen and Sally Anderson once again teaming with Marianne Archer to win the women's team section for the fourth straight year. Similarly dominant were brothers Gordon, Gary and Bruce Moller, who defended their veteran team title. The fastest team was Capital Sports Med of Tina Harris, Glen Muirhead and Trevor Woodward, who won their mixed team category in 4hrs 08min 36secs.

Old hands from the Crazyman's old days were back in force, with Waikanae's Mark Hearfield beating Dave Rudge in the Masters Multisport for athletes over 50 years old. In the old days Hearfield was a top local triathlete, so he duly outpaced Rudge on the run and mountain bike section only to have Rudge pull him back on the kayak. But it was too little too late and Hearfield enjoyed a 20min win that despite being the alternative kayak course would have smashed the existing Masters record by 30min.

Indeed, on cold, rainy day with muddy and slippery conditions the only record to fall was in the Duathlon mixed category where Wellingtonians Kirsty Berry and Rodney Wallace defended their 2010 win with a record finish of 3hrs 36min. Among duathletes Upper Hutt mountain bike specialist Kim Hamer-Hurst was an easy winner of the individual women's race in 3hrs 58min 01secs while Lower Hutt's own Stephen Butler won the men's race in 3hrs 37min 02secs.
