

## Jones & Ussher Smash Opponents & Records Alike

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A year ago at the Fine Signs Crazyman, Wellington multisporter, Dan Jones, illustrated a rare combination of talent and determination to overcoming a slow kayak and a series of punctures to win Wellington's premier multisport race by five minutes. In 2017, however, the 26-year-old was all talent.

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Established in 1991, the Fine Signs Crazyman has long been a proving ground for future champions. A look through the Hall of Fame at Crazyman.kiwi reveals a who's-who of the sport. World champions Steve Gurney, Kristina Anglem, Jill Westenra, Emily Miazga, Fleur Pawsey, Gordon Walker, Jesse Simson and Richard and Elina Ussher have all won the annual Hutt City event.

Indeed, Elina Ussher won the Fine Signs Crazyman for the seventh time in 2017. But the race of the day went to Jones. The defending champion reacted well to the tag of race favourite, finishing the 13k kayak across Wellington Harbour with the front bunch and then breaking clear on the 28k mountain bike over Belmont Regional Park.

With Jones' strongest discipline yet to come on the 13k trail run through Korokoro Stream, he was never going to be headed. But for good measure he clocked the fastest run of the day on the way to smashing his own race record by 10min to win in 3hrs 30min 47secs.

As second placed Patrick Higgins would say at the finish line, "If Dan was leading on the bike there was no way anyone was going to pull him back on the run."

"I just felt pretty good the whole way," shrugged Jones of the record breaking result.

Higgins, from Nelson, finished 18min back, just 3min clear of Lower Hutt's own Blair Simpson, who also took out the veteran honours.

Elina Ussher won everything and broke every record, taking out both the open woman and veteran women honours with new records in both. The Finnish born Nelsonian didn't have things entirely her own way, with Wellington's Lizzy Bunckenberg leading her out of the kayak by a handful of seconds and then staying within 1min through the opening 10k of the mountain bike.

Once into the Hutt hills, however, Ussher cleared out to finish the mountain bike with nine minutes in hand. She added another minute to her lead during the run to break her own race record by 58secs with 4hrs 16min 03secs. Bunckenberg followed 10min later, nine minutes clear of her twin sister Kathryn.

In fine, mild conditions, some 300 participants from as far afield as Dunedin and Auckland turned out for the 27th Fine Signs Crazyman.

In other racing, the multisport teams section also saw a new record, with Wellingtonians Tom Simmons, Rob Kilvington and Stuart Milne winning by half an hour in 3hrs 43min 36secs.

National champion runner, Dougal Thorburn, proved he's no slug on the mountain bike to win the duathlon title in 2hrs 29min 03secs, 11min clear of fellow Wellingtonians Patrick McKenna and Chris Cheesemore, who also claimed first and second among veteran men. Wellington's Emma O'Loughlan ran from third to first to win the women's race ahead of Carys Coleman and Anthea Morrison in 3hrs 34min 43secs.

The duathlon teams saw standout mountain biker Ed Crossling break his own mountain bike record by a minute to set up teammate Tony Keith for an easy win in the duathlon teams race. They also broke the course record, taking six minutes off with 2hrs 24min 45secs to beat last year's winners Mansour Youseff and Laurence Pidcock by 14min. Wellingtonians Rhonda Gardner and Emma Pescini took line honours among women in 3hrs 32secs.

Other standouts included Upper Hutt's 14-year-old Sean Caulfield and Wellington's 15-year-old Ashleigh Horton, who became the youngest male and female to ever finish the multisport or duathlon events solo. Local stalwart, Les Morris, kept his streak alive as the only person to have raced in all 27 editions of the Fine Signs Crazyman. But the biggest cheer of the day was reserved for visually impaired athlete Neelu Jennings.

The Wellingtonian became the first legally blind person to finish the 54k Fine Signs Crazyman. Having lost 70% of her sight at age 16 after waking up from a brain injury that had put her into a coma, the 32-year-old is well-known for setting herself adventurous challenges to highlight people such as herself being limitless provided they have support. Today she raced with guides in each section, including a two-person kayak and tandem mountain bike. Organisers had set a safety-induced cut-off time of 5:00pm to ensure Jennings would finish in daylight hours. But she exceeded everyone's expectations, including her own, to finish before 3:00pm with a race time of 6hrs 18min 41secs.

The Hutt City Crazyman is one of New Zealand's longest-running multisport races. Race Day has traditionally been in the first weekend of May. But organisers are contemplating a shift to December. Visit [www.crazyman.kiwi](http://www.crazyman.kiwi).