

day at the races

from round the country

CRAZY(WO)MAN '97

by Michael Jacques

You may not have to be crazy to be involved in multisport circles, but a certain amount of "off the wall enthusiasm" goes a long way in Wellington's aptly named 'Crazy(Wo)Man event.

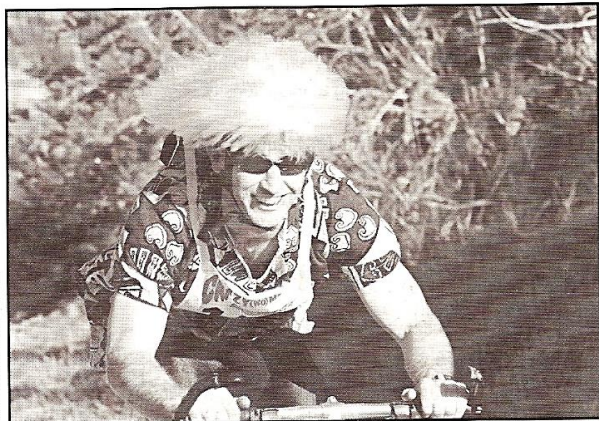


Photo: Jacques Fotosportif

Crazy (Wo)man!

And a long way, is exactly the distance covered in this popular Coast to Coast style tour of Wellington; competitors in two days running, mountain biking, kayaking - then running, road cycling, kayaking and mountain biking their way from East to West across the capital.

Some two hundred and fifty lined up on Eastbourne beach in 1997, and on a crisp, clear winter's morn' local runner Rob Park was first off the mark. Clearing out for a course record previously held by Olympian Jonathan Wyatt, Park handed his "Butt kickers" team mate a four minute lead over Johnsonville Cycle Vets. Another five minutes ticked by before Murray Doughty ran into transition as the first individual, but a less than slick transition saw Doughty joined by defending champion Jason Brown for the 32km mountain bike.

Taking in the ridges overlooking the Hutt Valley, it's on this 32km mountain bike that racing tends to take shape; some better prepared than others for the long hills and technical nature of this stage. 1997 proved no different, with run specialist Doughty losing eleven minutes to Brown, who in turn lost his lead to the two wheeled skills of John Cussins. Into kayaks the new leader held seventeen seconds on the defending champion.

Day one's kayak stage had, however, undergone serious alteration for 1997; Wellington's Indian summer had left the Hutt River too low for even the lightest of paddlers. Competitors now faced another 6km on mountain bikes before kayaking the lower stretches

of the river into Wellington Harbour, along to Petone wharf and back to day one's traditional Sladden Park finish line. Teams 'Loaded Hog' and 'Argo Amphibians' had taken over the lead along Petone foreshore with individual leaders Cussins and Brown holding down sixth and seventh overall. By day's end Cussins had stretched his lead out to a still tight fifty-eight seconds.

The race amongst women, however, was anything but tight; New Zealand Duathlon rep Susie Wood finishing day one with a ten minute lead thanks to a strong performance in, supposedly, her weakest discipline - the kayak. Enjoying a four minute cushion after the run, Wood did, however, suffer a few moments of doubt when passed towards the end of the mountain bike. However, that forty-five second deficit to Penny Edwards was soon erased once out on the water and Woods started day two as odds on favourite for the win. And so it proved, Wood extended her lead to thirteen minutes after day two's run along Petone foreshore and around Belmont reserve. Thirteen minute became twenty six-minutes during the road cycle over the Haywards, Paekakareki and Pukerua Bay hills and once into the kayaks at Puatahanui Inlet, Wood was out on her own heading for an eventual thirty-two minute win over the shell shocked Edwards; with Wellington netball standout Cheryl Young a distant third.

Johnsonville Cycles were proving too classy for the other teams, lying third amongst men and leading the veteran's and women's grades; New Zealand mountain bike rep Anne Mahoney making the difference for their women's team with times on two wheels of thirteenth and twentieth fastest overall. Overall honours, however, went to The Loaded Hog, their kayaking proving the deciding factor over Argo Amphibians.



Photo: Jacques Fotosportif

NZ Mountain bike champion Anne Mahoney.

Day two for John Cussins started with him trying not to allow Jason Brown, the superior runner, any more than the fifty-eight seconds Cussins had held at the end of day one. Brown, though, had other ideas as he and third placed Neil Gellatly worked together in an effort, not merely to put time on Cussins but also to hold fourth placed Murray Doughty who finished day two's run over a minute in front of the pair. Brown, though, had achieved his goal, taking back Cussin's fifty-eight seconds and pulling away by sixty-five.

Just as quickly, however, those sixty-five seconds disappeared; a slick transition by Cussins turning the event into a cycle race which he duly won. Leaving 1996 winner Brown to contemplate a weekend of unusually sub-par rides, Cussins enjoyed, after the 53km cycle, a ten minute margin that, despite the formalities of the remaining kayak and mountain bike legs, turned out to be the exact same margin by which he eventually won. A placegetter in 1996 John Cussins, by winning in 1997, proved that which Wellington multisporters already know you'd have to be a Crazy(Wo)Man 'not' to come back !.