

Crazyman Kicks On

For 14 years the Kathmandu Crazyman has been central New Zealand's premier multisport event. This year 350 endurance junkies went to the line, amongst them national class names like Gordon Walker, Al Cross, Craig Stevens, Angus Wood and Kristina Anglem.

For Kristina Anglem, the Kathmandu-sponsored event was a return to the race that started her career. More than a decade ago she was an anonymous 17 year old rookie in the inaugural 1991 Crazyman. This year she returned as the world's leading female adventure racer.

The woman they call "Xena - the real Warrior Princess" led all the way to smash the course record by 20min. This came despite a puncture during the mountain bike and a swim in the first few metres of the kayak section. But the always-upbeat athlete just said, "I guess that leaves room to improve on the record again next year."



The men's race was in total contrast to the women, with four nationally ranked men all vying for the win. Wellington's Angus Wood - who finished 3rd in this year's Sportshub.com national series - led through the opening 16km mountain run from Eastbourne over Mt Lowry to Wainuiomata. But Auckland up and comer Gordon Walker took the front during the 34km mountain bike along the Hutt Hills Skyline.

Walker led for the remainder of the race to hold out hard charging defending champion Al Cross. Cross, a top performer on the Wellington scene for several years, had announced his arrival on the national scene with a strong fourth in 2002's Alexandra Gold Rush. The Wellingtonian returned to win the Central Otago event this year, and with his local knowledge as a two-time Crazyman winner he was co-favourite with Walker to win the Kathmandu-sponsored event.

There was a touch of irony then when Cross severely twisted his ankle just metres into the race that he knows so well. This left him hobbling through the demanding run, clocking 3min slower than last year and 1min slower than Walker. Angus Wood was a minute ahead of Walker but proved no match for the two favourites on the

mountain bike and as they swapped bikes for kayaks it was Walker from Cross.

With Walker enjoying a 4min lead the race appeared over. Both men are amongst the sports best kayakers, and halfway through the 12km paddle along the Petone Foreshore Walker still had 4min in hand. But then the Aucklanders' race began unravelling.

First he got caught on a fisherman's line as the race went past Petone Wharf. The fisherman of course tried to reel him in until Walker's super-committed girlfriend handed the overzealous fisherman a pocketknife and demanded, "Cut It!" The Aucklanders' luck then went from bad to worse, when with a kilometre to go the paddle slipped in his hand and he capsized.

It was here that we saw the determination of the man who many consider the next big thing in multisport circles. Racing without a spray skirt, Walker's JKK UFO promptly filled up with water. To most people an Eskimo roll would have been out of the question. But in an act of blind determination Walker tried four times to roll the boat back up, finally succeeding on his fourth attempt.

But the drama didn't finish there; with his boat now almost entirely full of water Walker's lead was now in serious danger. Seeing all this ahead of him Al Cross gave desperate chase and arrived at transition sprinting like an Olympic K1 paddler. Just 40secs ahead of him Walker's boat looked more like a submarine, but 40secs was all he needed and he held on in a final 200m run to the finish line for his biggest win yet.

Behind this thrilling race for line honours, Taupo's Craig Stevens battled through a virus to steal third off Angus Wood. In the teams, Wellingtonians Murray Doughty, Wayne Hiscock and Graham Moore defended their title from last year thanks to Hiscock breaking his own mountain bike record.

Other records to be broken included the women's mountain bike, with Wellington road cyclist Susy Wood slashing 24min of the record set by Welsh Commonwealth Games rep Penny Edwards in 1999. Wood's team won the mixed team category ahead of a team led by former world mountain running champion Melissa Moon and former All Black Murray Mexted. Moon provided one of the highlights by reducing Jill Westera's 1999 women's run record by 17min when she clocked the second fastest run overall.

Another highlight was surf lifesaving standout Anja Jennings. The 16 year old was part of the Tawa College winning school team and recorded the fastest female kayak time head of Jan Hales and Kristina Anglem.

This year's Crazyman also saw a hugely popular mountainbike duathlon option, which was won in record smashing time by Kristina Anglem's husband, Nat Anglem. Anglem clocked a run and mountain bike combination some 4min faster than multisport winner Gordon Walker... someone buy that boy a kayak!
