

Up & Comers, Old Hands & Ground Breakers Taking On Crazyman

A collection of old hands and new faces look likely to dominate this year's Fine Signs Crazyman.

More than 300 endurance junkies will line up in Lower Hutt on Sunday 7th May for the 27th running of Fine Signs Crazyman. Established in 1991, the 56k kayak, mountain bike and run is one of New Zealand's longest running multisport events. Past winners read like a who's-who of multisport: world champions such as Richard Ussher, Jill Westenra, Gordon Walker, Emily Miazga, Elina Ussher, Kristina Anglem, Alex Stewart, Steve Gurney and Jesse Simson have all won the Crazyman.

This, however, promises to be one for the rising stars as defending champion Daniel Jones looks to defend his title while Wellington twins Lizzy and Kathryn Bunckenberg will once again battle six-time winner and world champion, Elina Ussher.

On a course that is as spectacular as it is challenging, competitors from all ends of New Zealand will open up with a 13k kayak leg from Days Bay, along Wellington Harbour's eastern coastline to Petone Wharf and up the Hutt River.

Kayaks are swapped for a 27k mountain bike ride up the Hutt River Trail and over Belmont Regional Park, taking in a high point of close to 500m on Boulder Hill and a mixture of historic horse and cart trails and purpose built mountain bike tracks.

Then it's into running shoes for the final 13k trail run around Belmont Trig and the historic Korokoro Dam to Petone Foreshore, eventually finishing at Petone Wharf.

Daniel Jones has been in fine form, taking his second win in April's Porirua Grand Traverse, and will be favourite to retain his title at the Fine Sign Crazyman. The 26-year-old Wellingtonian will need to watch for another up and comer in Christchurch's Sam Goodall. With previous top-five performances at the Coast to Coast, Goodall is one of the South Island's top performers, but is taking on the gruelling Lower Hutt hills of the Fine Signs Crazyman for the first time.

Elina Ussher knows all about the Crazyman. The six-time winner has never been beaten in the Lower Hutt race and last year, at age 40, set a new course record. But the 2016 win was the Finnish-born Nelsonian's hardest fought, with several women finishing closer than ever.

In the last two years Wellington's own Bunckenberg twins have finished fourth and sixth (2015) and third and fifth (2016), with Lizzy traditionally having the upper hand. Both are vastly improved and more confident this year following first and third placings in their age group at last years world cross triathlon championships in Australia, with Lizzy taking gold. Kathryn, however, took out the Coast to Coast two-day race in February and followed up with a win in the Porirua Grand Traverse, so their rematch at the Fine Signs Crazyman will be much awaited. But they'll have to lift their game yet another notch to unseat Ussher, who won her fourth world title at the One-Day Coast to Coast.

No one, however, looks forward to the Fine Signs Crazyman more than local legend Les Morris. Daniel Jones was just eight months old when Morris raced 1991's inaugural Crazyman. The Bunckenbergs weren't even born. The 56-year-old Morris has raced every Crazyman since 1991 and was made a Crazyman life member last year. Which means he's duty bound to line up again in 2017.

At the other end of the scale Neelusha Jennings is taking on the Fine Signs Crazyman for the first time to try and be the first legally blind finisher of the iconic Lower Hutt event. The Wellingtonian lost 70% of her sight at age 16 after waking up from a brain injury that had put her into a coma. But she has not let that limit her life and has finished other iconic events such as the Coast to Coast. At the Fine Signs Crazyman she will race in the adventure category, where two people race the full distance together in two-person kayaks, tandem mountain bikes and then run together. To finish the race the 32 year must beat the 5pm cut-off time at the Petone Beach finish line.

Organisers are expecting more than 300 participants for the 56k tour through the icon outdoor elements of Wellington's Hutt City. The event includes the full kayak, run and mountain bike for teams and individuals, and also a run and mountain bike duathlon option for non-kayakers.

The 27th Hutt City Crazyman starts at 8:00am on Sunday morning on Days Bays in Eastbourne. Late entries will be taken up to 4:00pm on Saturday at Avanti Cycles, 44 Bloomfield Terrace, Lower Hutt. For further details visit www.crazyman.co.nz or Ph: 0275 244 821.