

Crazyman Turns 25 !

Wellington's premier multisport race came of age in 2015, when the Hutt City Crazyman ticked over its 25th year.



Crazyman start 1995.

Established in 1991, the Hutt City Crazyman is Wellington's longest-running multisport event. While other races come and go this kayak, mountain bike and trail run across the Hutt Valley is one of only a handful of events that have been a multisport mainstay for a quarter century or more.

A lot can happen to a sport in two decades, and even more can happen to an event. But through good times and bad, the Crazyman has stayed true to its origins. In 2015 the Hutt City Crazyman continued where it kicked off - offering a unique challenge for fitness enthusiasts of all age, ability and experience.

Designed around a challenging yet achievable tour of Wellington's icon outdoor elements - the harbour, hills and Hutt River the event has attracted as many as 550 starters. Coast to Coast legends Steve Gurney, Kristina Anglem, Jill Westenra, Emily Miazga, Richard and Elina Ussher, Fleur Pawsey, Gordon Walker and Jesse Simson all cut their teeth at the Crazyman.

Gurney (above) won the event in 1994, but only narrowly from local legends Dave Abbott and Brian Sanders, who had won the Coast to Coast way back in 1985. A year earlier another legend-to-come, 17 year old Kristina Strode-Penny (later Anglem), had triumphed in her very first multisport race, which of course led to world titles in both multisport and adventure racing.

The original race had been won by Lower Hutt legend, Paul Coles, who like Sanders had been around since the first Coast to Coast. Fittingly, Coles was back winning the 50-plus category in 2010's 20th Hutt City Crazyman.

Other early standouts included Niels Madsen, who finished first in 1992 and third in 1993, was top-10 at Coast to Coast and went on to age group world titles as a veteran triathlete.

In 1998 Lower Hutt's own Jonathan Wyatt illustrated his class as a six time world mountain running champion when a foray into cross-training saw him win the Crazyman ahead of Coast to Coast top-10 finishers Glenn Muirhead and Michael Jacques.



Steve Gurney won the Crazyman in 1994.

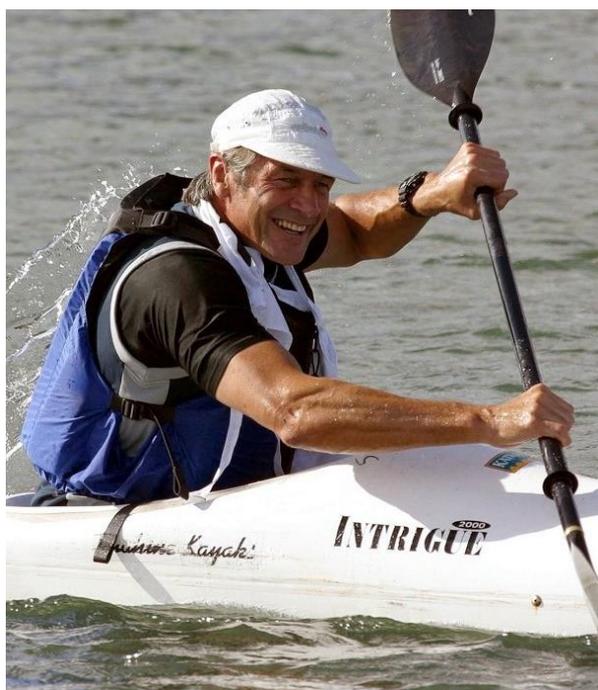
Similarly the women's race in 1997 had been a battle between Susy Wood and Penny Edwards, both of whom would go on to represent New Zealand and Wales as cyclists at the Commonwealth Games.

In those days the Crazyman was a two-day, 150k coast to coast-come-harbour to harbour concept from Lower Hutt across the region to Porirua.

Day One was a 16k trail run from Eastbourne along the Eastern Harbour ranges to Wainuiomata. Then it was onto mountain bikes for 34k along the Eastern hills and back down the Hutt River Trail. A 12k kayak completed the day, originally down the Hutt River to finish in Petone. But river straightening and water-hogging for the regions reservoirs eventually saw the kayak shifted to Wellington Harbour.

Day Two started with 19k trail run from Petone, along the Foreshore into Belmont Regional Park on Lower Hutt's western ranges. A 54k road cycle followed, taking the race over the Hayward's Hill and Paikakariki Hill to Porirua where the race finished with an 8k kayak and 8k mountain bike.

At 150k and almost 2000m of climbing, Steve Gurney called it tougher than the two day Coast to Coast. But the toughest part was actually organising it. The original course encompassed two city councils, two harbour boards, two Police permissions, Transit New Zealand and the Regional Council. With almost 100 volunteers, increasingly dangerous roads and increasingly difficult and expensive safety and concession issues, by the turn of the century the event had become unsustainable.



All Black legend Murray Mexted enjoyed it.



John Cussins was a Crazyman winner & organiser

The Crazyman was established by a keen group of local multisporters who had done a few Coast to Coast's and decided Wellington needed something similar. This was a familiar theme in multisports early years; races like the Mountain to Sea, the North Island Coast to Coast, the Head to Head and the Akitio Challenge were all inspired by the Coast to Coast and thrived for a while only to disappear for varying reasons. The Crazyman was no different, except it didn't disappear.

After almost 10 years the Crazyman's original crew of training buddies was gradually disappearing to the usual change of lifestyles, addresses, jobs and sports. In 1996 the Crazyman was up to 350 participants, but by 2000 one person was left handling an event that had become increasingly difficult and expensive to organise. At the same time the local multisport scene was experiencing something of a lull, and entries had diminished to around 100 when a former winner decided to step in.

John Cussins (above) won the Crazyman in 1997. His partner, Paula Stricksen, was one of the founding organisers and in 1999 they both actually finished second. Cussins knew how hard the event was organisationally and worried it might disappear he and training partner Michael Jacques set out to make the Crazyman a sustainable event for as long as someone cared enough to organise it.



Kristina Anglem won in 1993 & 2003.

Cussins thought the event was too tough to organise and perhaps too tough for people new to the sport. So they cut the second day and re-launched the event as an iconic outdoor tour of Lower Hutt. With support from Hutt City Council, the Crazyman became easier to handle and the one day format made it more accessible to a wider range of people. They changed the Crazyman motto from “The Race from Hell” to “A Hell of a Challenge” and whereas once most people thought you were crazy for taking on the Crazyman, now they say “you’re Crazy not too”.

Cussins and Jacques also recognised that to make an annual event successful there needed to be a consistent multisport scene, so they organised smaller events at different times of the year ranging from kayak races to mountain bike duathlons and lower-key multisport races. And while it didn’t happen overnight, it did happen. From just over 100 entries in 2000, by 2005 the Crazyman had exploded to more than 500 entries. When Coast to Coast champion Richard Ussher returned to win the 2005 Crazyman he was visibly taken aback at the difference between the race he’d won in 2000.

Some of the Crazyman’s success was good timing. Between 2001 and 2006 the sport enjoyed unprecedented growth, thanks in part to the Kiwi website sportzhub.com giving the sport a cultural hub. But even today, with Multisport trying to ride out a recession-induced lull since the late-2000s, the Crazyman has been attracting around 400 entrants. This is more than the early to mid-1990s when the original Crazyman and the sport in general was enjoying its first big boom.

After 25 years the Hutt City Crazyman now has a permanent place as central New Zealand’s premier multisport event. Although the event

continues to develop and adapt to its region and the sport

Since 2012 the Crazyman has been raced over an entirely new route. Increasing landowner and health and safety issues forced Jacques and Cussins to change the mountain bike section, which in turn forced them to also change the kayak and run. But in its 25th year, the new-look Crazyman is as spectacular as it is challenging.

The new 56k Crazyman opens up with a 13k kayak leg from Eastbourne’s Days Bay north Wellington Harbour’s eastern coastline and Petone Foreshore to finish on the Hutt River. Kayakers are swapped for mountain bikes for a 30k ride north up the Hutt River Trail to Dry Creek where they head west into Belmont Regional Park, riding over Boulder Hill past World War II ammunition bunkers to the historical Woolshed behind Maungarakei. Then it’s into running shoes for the final 18k trail run around Belmont Trig and down Korokoro Stream and along Petone Foreshore to finish at the iconic Petone Wharf.

The current course is slightly shorter and with less total climbing, but is typically tough. Kayakers still have to handle Wellington’s harbour, but the change in direction now makes the even more doable in rough weather. The climb up Boulder Hill is the highest ever and the mountain bike section also includes two short sections of bike carry, one through a tunnel. The run through Korokoro Stream is arguably the nicest trail in Wellington and rather than one huge uphill it now has three shorter but steeper and rougher hills. Current developments at Belmont Park will also see more single track introduced to the mountain bike section in the next few years.



The Crazyman remains an old-school challenge.



Elina & Richard Ussher have five wins each.

Nationally, the Speight's Coast to Coast, the Gold Rush, the Motu Challenge and the Crazyman are the only multisport events that attract truly national fields and the country's top athletes.

Take a look at the Crazyman's Hall of Fame. Back in 2000, the Crazyman was Richard Ussher's first major win after less than a year in the sport. He beat local legend Al Cross, who had won the Crazyman's last two day event in 1999 and would go on to win the 2001 Gold Rush. Three-time Coast to Coast winner Gordon Walker was another to cut his teeth at the Crazyman, with a win in 2003. Emily Miazga (2004), Jill Westenra (2000) and Elina Ussher (2005, 06, 07 & above) all scored wins at the Crazyman before taking out Speight's Coast to Coast titles, while Kristina Anglem took out the Crazyman both before (1993) and after (2003) becoming one of the best female multisporters in history.

Historically, however, it has been the Usshers who have dominated. As of 2015 both Richard and Elina have won the Crazyman five times, with Elina setting a new race record in 2015's 25th anniversary event. But there's been the odd upset too, like Jonathan Wyatt in 1998, former kayaking world champion Andrew Martin in 2001 and mountain biker Katrine Lawton beating Coast to Coast champion Fleur Pawsey in 2008. Interestingly, Coast to Coast minor placegetters Dwarne Farley, Nathan Fa'avae, James Coubrough, Luke Osbourne, Dougal Thorburn and Trevor Voyce have won at the Crazyman.



Nelson's Cameron Jones finished at age 14.

First and foremost, however, the Crazyman is a community event embracing all age, ability and backgrounds from school kids, house wives and corporates to tradesmen and retirees - some experienced endurance athletes, some relative rookies looking for a new challenge.

And if the full 56k seems too daunting, the popular duathlon option caters for non-kayakers and team options include popular corporate and school categories.

Fittingly 2015's 25th Hutt City Crazyman saw the youngest ever finisher of the feature multisport race in 14 year old Nelsonian Cameron Jones.

In 2012 Lower Hutt's John Wood had become the eldest ever finisher at age 74. Fifteen years earlier he had support crewed his teenage daughter Susy to a win in the women's race.

Similarly, the original race organiser, Dave Rudge, is still a regular participants 25 years later. And while current organiser Michael Jacques has been at all 25 events either racing, support crewing or organising, local stalwart Les Morris is the only person to have participated in every Hutt City Crazyman.

After this year's 25th anniversary event almost 10,000 people will have experienced everything that is the Hutt City Crazyman. And rather than being crazy, they'll all tell you that you'd be crazy not to.



Still Wgtn's favourite multisport event.