

## A Year of Three's at the Crazyman

This Sunday endurance junkies from all ends of the country will be going Crazy for the 30th time as they line up in Lower Hutt for the Fine Signs Crazyman. But all eyes will be on two people both vying for their third consecutive titles.

More than 300 participants are expected to toe the line for the annual kayaking, mountain biking and trail running event. Established in 1991, the 56k scenic tour around the iconic outdoor elements of Wellington's Hutt Valley is one of New Zealand's longest-running multisport races.

In 2017 the Fine Signs Crazyman made history when Nelson teenager, Cameron Jones, became the youngest ever winner of a major multisport event. Jones returned to win in 2018 as well, and still only 19 is now chasing his third consecutive title as the race tick over three decades.

Race director Michael Jacques, however, says, "Cameron won't have it all his own way."

Lining up against the Nelsonian are former place getters Blair Simpson (LH) and Matt Penney (Wgtn), who can expect to have superior course knowledge in their favour, while masters standouts Gary Jarvis, Glenn Muirhead (Wgtn) and Brent Edwards (Nelson) are good enough to challenge for the top three spots.

Tactically, the race could challenge the youngster too, with Muirhead, Jarvis and Simpson expected to head him in the opening 13k kayak across Wellington Harbour. The defending champion is expected to catch them on his speciality, the 30k mountain bike over Belmont Regional park, so the race for line honours is likely to come down to who has the legs for the final 13k run through the historic Korokoro Stream.

The women's race is expected to be a little more cut and dried, with Wellington's Corrinne O'Donnell also trying for her third consecutive title. But athletes either side of her on the age spectrum will keep her honest. Nelson teenager Maggie McLean and Wellington super-vet Vicki Vertongen are expected to battle for the minor podium placing, which might see them closer than expected to O'Donnell.

"Cam Jones and Corrinne O'Donnell are part of a new wave of multisport talent who have cut their multisport teeth at the Fine Signs Crazyman," says Jacques. "I'm 52 and I've been doing this stuff since my teens as well, so I really get a kick out of seeing others grow up with endurance sports like I did."



*Defending champions, Corrinne O'Donnell & Cam Jones*

The race Jacques organises is also coming of age. December 8th will be the 30th running of the Fine Signs Crazyman.

"We think the Crazyman is the second longest running multisport race in New Zealand, behind only the Coast to Coast. And over the years the race has been won by most the sport's greats too, so it has a very real stature on the national scene."

Indeed, past winners read like a who's-who of multisport history: world champions such as Steve Gurney, Gordon Walker, Emily Miazga, Elina Ussher, Kristina Anglem, Alex Stewart, Jess Simson, Richard and Elina Ussher, Dougal Allen and Wellington's own Jill Westenra have all won the annual Lower Hutt event.

Jacques points out, however, that multisport is really a "people's sport" aimed at getting anyone of any age and ability into New Zealand's great outdoors. People like local stalwart, Les Morris, the only person to have raced every Crazyman to date, personify this and he is entered again this Sunday.

"I call this stuff 'every mans Everest,' he says. "In the scheme of things, not many people can achieve challenges like Mt Everest. But with a bit of inspiration and motivation they can achieve something like racing around their region or across their country. That's what events like the Crazyman are about."

And the Fine Signs Crazyman is something worth achieving. On a course that is as spectacular as it is challenging, it kicks off with a 13k kayak from Days Bay in Eastbourne and heads along Wellington Harbour's eastern coastline to Petone. Paddlers take in the historic Petone Wharf and finish in the lower reaches of the Hutt River at Sladden Park.

At Petone they swap kayaks for mountain bikes for a 30k ride up the Hutt River trail and into Belmont Regional Park. The route takes in a hidden tunnel and creek crossings, then peaks out for 360-degree views from the volcanic rock-strewn Boulder Hill, before passing historic WWII ammunition bunkers and the regions oldest farm roads to finish on dedicated mountain bike trails at the historic Stratton Street Woolshed.

Bikes are then swapped for running shoes for the 13k trail run over the edge of Belmont Hill and down the bush clad Korokoro Stream. Following a trail that was first used by Maori in pre-European times, this run is as historic as it is spectacular and eventually finishes where European settlers first landed, on Petone Foreshore.

With harbour swells, 700m of vertical ascent and sometimes challenging terrain, the Fine Signs Crazyman has earned the title, the "race from hell."

"I prefer to say, 'it's a hell of a race'," laughs Jacques. "But it is challenging. That's the attraction of endurance sports; taking on something worth achieving and realising it's not that Crazy after all."

The 30th Fine Signs Crazyman starts at 8:00am on Sunday 8th December. For further details visit [www.crazyman.kiwi](http://www.crazyman.kiwi).

*Les Morris is taking on the Crazyman for the 30th time.*

