

Too Crazy Even For The Crazyman !

T'was once that we said events such as the Crazyman would never be cancelled. We raced rain or shine. But we live in changing times. The weather in 2019 was too crazy even for the Crazyman.

Everybody now knows of the demise of this year's Crazyman. Most understood that some things are just out of anyone's control. But we thought a little insight into life as a race organiser might be of interest in such times. If only because there is no race report to read.

One can be complacent at times. The previous eight editions of the Crazyman had been clear blue skies. But when you organise races you're always planning for your worst possible day. This time we got it.

Every year we go out on the course in the worst of wind and rain, assessing and re-assessing plans. We have been out in worse rain and worse wind, and even when the various creeks are in flood. But we had never seen water levels rise so fast, and certainly never seen an electrical storm like that in Wellington.

Best Laid Plans

At 4:00am on race day I was lying in bed listening to the rain, wind and lightening, waiting, hoping, for it to back off. Rain and wind we can race in, and we had already decided to do our bad weather kayak option, and had plans to avoid flooded sections of the mountain bike route. But lightening!

At 5:30am I was still awake and the storm was still raging. I phoned Upper Hutt Community Rescue and we both agreed the event couldn't go ahead. The rain was heavier than forecast, the lightening was way too risky and there was even heavier rain forecast for midday. We had crew going into the course at 7:00am, so we had to make a call now.

This is the art of event organisation. Endurance sports are all about pushing personal limits, but as an organiser the limits you set are based on:

- 1) the welfare of the least fit and experienced participants,
- 2) the welfare of your crew,
- 3) the response capabilities of a rescue crew that are likely to be several times busier than normal on terrain that is going to be less accessible than normal.

Once decided the next step is to communicate the cancellation. First, we contacted any crew who were scheduled to be on the course before 7:30am: water safety, people marking various sections of the mountain bike and run, marshals heading into remote areas, etc, etc. Then we posted the cancellation on the website, the event Facebook, my personal Facebook and sent out an email to all participants. Then we worked our way through the remaining marshals. By 7:30am everyone involved in the event knew it was cancelled, including sponsors and Councils.

Everyone was disappointed (many relieved). But it was heartening that not one person expressed any outrage. Everyone appreciated that this was a safety thing.

On the lighter side, one of the more amusing sides of the day was four or five support crews turning up at the start because their participant hadn't informed them the race was cancelled!

After the adrenaline of deciding and communicating the cancellation, it dawns on you that several months work has gone up in smoke, or rather, has been washed away. But there are things to do. Most of the mountain bike course and some of the finish line was set up the previous day, so that had to be cleaned up. And we need to look at the most vulnerable parts of the course to assess conditions, water levels etc for future reference. As in, when it's this high, this windy, this wet... you can't do it!

So, for us this year's Crazyman was still a full day. At 6pm we were still unpacking a truck just like any other year.



What Next

As much as you plan for situations like this, you don't truly expect them to happen. December is summer after all. But it is also a busy time of year, so organising a replacement event isn't an easy thing.

As much as we'd love to, after several days pondering and talking to the myriad of people involved, we don't think we can get a replacement event together. There are concessions and permissions to re-apply for, sponsors to talk with, service providers and venues to re-schedule and then 50-plus volunteers to find. With Christmas looming, then New Year and the January holiday period, we don't think we could get all the ducks in a row until well into February. So, we're sorry to say the 30th Crazyman will have to wait until December 2020.

Your Entry Fees

While we've been pondering all this, we've also been fielding calls, emails and texts asking if the race is going ahead and/or if there is a refund coming.

To be frank, the answer to both questions is no. Almost all

events have a no refund policy, just as we do, for the simple reason that regardless of whether an event goes ahead or not, everything must be paid for. Our policy was shown clearly when you entered in the waiver you must read and tick prior to the entry being accepted.

We appreciate this is harsh. But it is reality. In most cases, if an event refunded, they would be personally bankrupt overnight.

The event industry is incredibly risky financially and 90 percent of organisers are involved first and foremost as a service to their sport and are keen athletes like you.

We organise five events a year and while this is indeed how I make my living, the Crazyman event itself loses money. But we keep organising it because it is a popular event and we want to support our sport. And provided the loss doesn't become worse, we will continue to organise it.



Future Proofing

The irony in all this is the fact that for the past six months been pondering an event insurance policy that has just become available in New Zealand.

Traditionally the insurance industry has struggled to come up with affordable policies for participation events. Really, it's not a lot different to concert insurance, but for some reason they haven't been able to wrap their collective heads around it. But an English company is setting up in Australia and New Zealand with a tailor-made policy whereby we can insure against cancellation either by...

- 1) insuring the event against cancellation and then cater for that cost by adding it to the entry fee, or,
- 2) entrants can insure their own entry fee in a similar manner to air travel insurance, where you'd just select it or not when you enter (much like buying a tee shirt).

People like to have choices these days, so if we went ahead, we'd likely go with the latter option.

Our Ethos

In regard to how we organise events; in every case the event's longevity is first and foremost. We control this via a formula where entry fees pay for the organisational costs and we make our money from sponsorship and merchandise. So, the user pays for their event and any money we make is via our own work and reputation.

This model becomes challenging when, as per the Crazyman, the entry fee income does not match the cost of organising

the event. But it is the best way to guarantee the longevity of an event.

Of course, the Crazyman wasn't always so marginal. In the mid-2000s, when multisport was at its peak, organising costs were less and the event industry was only half as big as it is now, the Crazyman was very viable.

But the market has changed in the last 10 to 15 years. Event costs have sky-rocketed faster than what sponsors and participants are willing to pay. The number of events out there has doubled despite participation having seen no growth since 2010. More events meant more choice, which saw team participation fall away in multisport and triathlon. The Crazyman gets more solo participants than ever, but less teams and only two thirds of the total numbers.

Of course, sometimes we make our own beds to lay in. We personally want our sport and our events to be accessible, so we purposefully set entry fees at the low end of comparable events in the industry.

None of this is meant as an excuse. Just an insight into what we do. I've personally been at every Crazyman either organising, racing or supporting, and organisationally it is about three months work across a 12-month period... so no one is more gutted than me to see it cancelled.

In 25 years of organising and 100-plus events, this is only the second time we've had to cancel. But we won't be letting this stop the Crazyman's future.

