

## Karapoti '95

Until 1997 the Karapoti Classic was a weekend celebration starting with a downhill event on the Saturday and the Classic on the Sunday.

The downhill event was held down the gravel 4WD access track on Upper Hutt's Mt Climie. It was a sign of those early times, when downhill harked back to the Californian fire road descents that kick-started mountain biking in the late '70s. Most mountain bikers didn't consider themselves cross-country or downhill exponents, but rather "mountain bikers" keen to have a crack at whatever riding and racing was available.

But the inevitable development of the sport brought specialisation and by the late-90s fire road racing was a dying art, replaced by the more spectacular and specialist single track downhill formats. But no one who raced or watched will ever forget Darryn Henderson and co. plummeting down Mt Climie at 80-plus kilometres an hour.

Below is a 1995 Karapoti report featuring both the Mt Climie and Karapoti races from the website of the now defunct Cycle Services shop.



Karapoti's Classic Start - 1995

### The Downhill

The Karapoti downhill is so popular that with two days to go, offers of \$100 for an entry were being made - and some of them were at least 3/4 serious.

Saturday's downhill day had unusual weather - the summit of Mt Climie was cold and wet, but at "The Chute" where spectators gather it was hot and sunny and happening. Many riders pulled their goggles off half way down because they were too muddy, only to be squinting into the sun down The Chute, then romping into the pitch black tunnel at the finish.

There were two points of contention in this year's downhill, the eliminator system and the tunnel. Mt Climie is essentially a steep, high speed downhill, the emphasis being on nailing the best line through corner after corner. If the race was run following on the 4WD road right to the bottom, it would favour smooth, confident, technical descenders who know the course well. However, showmanship and spectator bloodlust demand that "The Chute" be included - there's nothing like an 85kph ski jump to get the adrenalin flowing. But this leads to the problem of where to finish the race.

Now that the track down to the tunnel has been widened, the bottom of the hill, just before the tunnel entrance would seem to be the obvious finish line. This year the race continued right through the tunnel and back up a slight rise for about 40m to the finish caravan.

A number of riders led down at the bottom of the hill, but were beaten either through the tunnel or in the sprint up to the finish line. This led to some upset eliminations, and brought us to the second point - the elimination system.

Last year's race had the fairest possible system - best of two timed runs, with the top riders going into an elimination contest against their nearest rival for a possible one place advancement. Unfortunately, the computer timing went haywire and it was dark before the contest was finished. The racing was however, faster, closer and spectacular, and the results were an accurate reflection of who was fastest.

This year, to make things simpler, timing was ignored in favour of a series of win or die elimination runs. It made a refreshing change from the stopwatch obsession, but it also meant that where two slower riders were seeded together, one would advance, and where two fast riders were racing, one wouldn't advance. This could have been cleaned up by allowing the fastest losers to proceed to the second round.

Some of the second round runs were decidedly uneven too, and as things worked out the two favourites, Darryn Henderson and Glen Sisarich, were both eliminated (after a puncture and a crash) despite looking the fastest in earlier rounds. Still, it makes for interesting racing when the element of luck is given such free reign and there were no timing muck-ups.

Team CS didn't have a great day results-wise. Bugle got pipped at the line in his first run after his legs blew up in the tunnel. Karl came up against Darryn Henderson much sooner than he would have liked, but was right up there to the end. Rod missed out on entering, but did a couple of awesome demonstration runs, while poor Jo broke her shoulder blade going all-out against Jodie MacDonald in the semi-final.

Michael Ronning of Australia was the overall men's winner, with his fastest run being the final in 6min 39secs. Impressively, he went on to third place the next day in the Classic too. Jodie MacDonald was fastest woman in every round with 7min 42secs at best.

Highlights of the day included Jonny Waghorn winning the inaugural Mt Climie unicycle elimination race - fully out there. Also a four-way demonstration race between Glen Sisarich, Darryn Henderson, Rod Bardsley and Dean Raven, that grunge shirt and beach short clad hell-man from New Plymouth. And the dude who lost it on The Chute, almost completely off the bike, but miraculously bounced back into his seat and kept going at full pace - most rad.

The Kennett brothers didn't quite manage to ride their Tridem blindfolded downhill - the valves kept tearing out of their tubes. But they did run another awesome downhill race.

Next year we'll be selling entries on the day outside Te Marua dairy for \$100 each. Just don't tell the Kennetts.



A Cycle Services rider dropping into "The Chute"

### The Classic

As NZ's first true classic mountain bike race, the Karapoti Classic is something of a leader in its field - the biggest, the best run, the frottiest, and now the first with an entry restriction. On the day a few extras slipped through and the race started with 1035 entries.

There is no longer a dodgy looking swing bridge across the river - it's been replaced with a huge yellow bridge. For a few moments we wondered if the race would start on the bridge instead of through the river. But no, of course not - it wouldn't be the same.

In the expert men's race, Jon Hume was notable by his absence - his coach is rumoured to have said that there was one race he wasn't allowed to do this season - you guessed it. So Craig Lawn shralved around the course to win in 2:28.

Kathy Lynch was back to defend her unbeaten streak of six wins. But she was up against world number 2, Caroline Alexander of England. So a hell-race was on the cards.

Our on the spot Team CS reporter, Richard Smith, who is pretty handy on a bike himself, said that although Caroline started behind the expert men, she was riding through them up the first hill like they were going backwards. Richard clung to her wheel for about 30min until he popped, but some hell pace down the Rock Garden saw him catch up, only to have her run past him up the Devil's Staircase.

Unfortunately Caroline suffered the Karapoti curse. First with a puncture, then a blowout down Big Ring led to a fully munting hell crash. So Kathy Lynch won again, but the plucky Pom showed her class by finishing second with a smile and signing mega autographs after a day that would make lesser people burning their bike and kicking spectators aside.

Originally, the Karapoti was a take it or leave it hard core 50k race for real mountain bikers. But over the past two years the intro and beginners races have become really popular and the social atmosphere of the race has grown enormously.

The start/finish area is like a carnival with food vendors, massage tent, bike shops and wholesalers, a barbecue and hundreds of people chilling out watching the continual stream of riders finishing for several hours.

At the huge plush Cycle Services tent we had an eye-catching string of CS T-shirts for decoration as we hung out and ate donuts and drank coffee while checking out the scene. Spotting Gwilym of Cactus Climbing in a distant corner of the tent typing furiously into a laptop, I found he was writing a review of the Karapoti, so while he wasn't looking I paged through it and stole all his ideas. (Next time get it all on disc to save me typing time - Ed).

After the race was the wheel building competition and the limbo and bunny hopping competitions. As you will no doubt all know, Henry was the wheel building champion last year and the pressure was on. Forgetting the essential wheel-crunch stand was not a smart move, but luckily we managed to build one out of old timber and nails from the swing bridge.

The competition turned out to be Bruce Stewart of Hope Gibbons. Henry was fresh from a scenic helicopter flight over the Karapoti course, and therefore not in his best wheel building mindset, but managed to slap one together in 10 minutes and take the title again. The testing by Aussie Michael Ronning was very intense and both wheels held up well. So Henry C.U. is NZ wheel building champion yet again.

The limbo competition was won by a small but highly skilled kid on a very small mountain bike who managed to ride under the pole until his handgrips hit - he didn't leave a millimetre to spare. The bunnyhop competition got really high and ended with a battle between a BMX dude and one of the Aussie riders on a std MTB. Amazingly the MTB won out - here's one guy who doesn't have to get off for logs.

Team CS race of the day was between Adrian and Brent for \$20, with classic quote from Adrian: upon catching up to Brent, who was fixing a puncture, "Ah, Little Nig, I've got you now!", only to puncture himself round the next corner, get passed by Brent, then crash and tear his leg open trying to catch back up. Meanwhile Bugle got hard and proved that he's not just strictly downhill by completing a real cross country race. The fastest CS rider was Richard Smith in a time of 2:55.

The whole thing was going off and fully frot, congratulations to finishers, everybody who helped out, and of course the Kennett brothers for being out there enough to run it.