

# NZ's Original Mountain Bike Race

In mountain bike circles the first weekend in March means one thing - the Karapoti Classic!

Every year mountain bikers from all ends of New Zealand and the world clamour for one of a thousand slots in what has become "New Zealand's Must Do Mountain Bike Event".

Established in 1986, the Karapoti Classic is the longest running mountain bike event in the Southern Hemisphere. Created by Wellington's Kennett Brothers, who between them have influenced mountain biking more than anyone else in New Zealand, Karapoti is less a race than it is a very real culture.

1988



A culture built via a combination of innovative organisation, spectacular scenery, an exciting social scene, and a unique challenge that is at the same time uncompromising, achievable and inspirational.

Based within the rugged splendour of Wellington's Akatarawa Ranges, 10km north of Upper Hutt, the classic that is Karapoti revolves around an uncompromising, some say cruel, 50km of 4WD trails, gnarly single track, wheel sucking sludge, raging river crossings, wall to wall wilderness and huge hills that have you grinding a granny ring up but grinning like a goon on the way down.

Key elements of the course such as "The Rock Garden," "Devil's Staircase," and "Big Ring Boulevard," are spoken in hushed tones of nervous anticipation and misty sometimes bloody memories. It's the toughest mountain bike race in the Southern Hemisphere, but also the most awe-inspiring.



Karapoti, however, is more than just a tough race. The post-race scene at Karapoti Park, with thousands of people lounging under the late-summer sun, is reason enough to enter in itself. And if the full 50km sounds a

bit daunting there's a 20km option for off road rookies, spectators, supporters, school kids and active families that is every bit as stunning but less than half the distance and has only one hill.

With a prize purse totalling \$30,000, the Karapoti Classic is the richest race on the New Zealand mountain biking circuit. This, along with the prestige and tradition of Karapoti, attracts some of the world's best riders.



Past winners have included Kiwi Olympians Kathy Lynch and Kashi Leuchs, Commonwealth Games silver medallists Susy Pryde and Rosara Joseph, world junior champions Anton Cooper (ChCh-2012), Lisa Mathison (Australia-2003, 2004) and Nathalie Schneitter (Switzerland-2002), and former world number one Susan De Mattae (USA).

First and foremost, however, Karapoti is a people's race catering for all ages, abilities, genders and walks of life.

Along with the unique experience there are five years age grades and special categories for corporate teams, family teams, tandems, the best-dressed rider, the rider with the worst luck on race day and even uni-cycles.

Catering for everyone from elite to also ran, the Karapoti culture is such that the slowest riders are celebrated every bit as much as the few who manage to break the magical three-hour mark.

American cycling magazine VeloNews ranks Karapoti amongst the top-25 mountain bike races in the world, and participants apparently agree because for more than a decade we've been forced to limit the event to 1000 entrants.

Little wonder then that the Karapoti Classic is known as, "New Zealand's Must Do Mountain Bike Event".

