

## Kashi's Win That Got Away

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*Kashi Leuchs was NZ's top international mountain biker from the mid-90s through to the mid-2000's, ranking among the world top-10 and representing New Zealand at the Olympics and Commonwealth Games. He set a Karapoti record in 1998 that stood for eight years. But this blog from his 1999 race diary tells of "the win that got away."*

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Last weekend I raced the biggest mountain biking event in NZ, the Karapoti Classic. It is a 50km mountain bike marathon in Upper Hutt, near Wellington. The course is really severe, with river crossings and three major climbs, one so steep you have to run almost the whole way up (aptly named the Devils staircase).

This is New Zealand's premier mountain bike race, so I was really aiming for a good race and to try to break my course record from last year. But rain the night before and during the race made that task extremely difficult. We started up the gorge quite fast, with local rider Trevor Woodward, Sweden's Kim Eriksson and myself forming the lead pack.

I took the lead at about 12km on the first main hill, a 5km long climb called "Deadwood", and by the top I had a couple of minutes. I had a smooth ride down the rock garden, which is the roughest descent of the course with big boulders and drop-offs, but then I felt really tired up the "Devils Staircase". Near the

top I looked back to see Kim only about 30sec behind.

This got me into action and I managed to increase the lead back out to 2min with 5km to go. But then I punctured. I repaired the puncture quickly, and inflated it with a CO2 cartridge. But in my haste I hadn't been careful enough with putting on my tire and it blew off and punctured my second tube!



By this time Kim had swept past and I was getting a bit agitated! But just when I was about to start walking home, a rider from the shorter "Karapoti Challenge" race, stopped and asked if I needed help. I felt pretty bad, but I asked if she would lend me her rear wheel, and she agreed.

In a normal world cup race I would not be allowed to do this. But Karapoti is so tough the rules allow for assistance from other riders. So eventually I was back on the bike and

managed to hold on to 2nd, but feeling a bit guilty for making someone else have to walk home instead of me... So thanks Anilia Patterson for your help!

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