

2006 - 21 & Counting

So Karapoti turned 21 this year. And what a birthday it turned out to be... record entries, record racing, perfect weather, riders from 11 countries... the 21st Birthday Giant Karapoti Classic was one of the best yet. In fact, some of you had so much fun that they've entered for 2007 already.

A 21st birthday is always special and Karapoti's was no different. Peter Hatton and Clinton Avery made sure of that with a record breaking battle that saw the closest finish ever.

All day they had been battling, with the Aussie getting away on the uphills and the Rotorua teenager coming through on the downhill and flats. They were inseparable going into the last river but hit it so hard they both crashed. Peter was up quickly, but Clinton cramped and fell again, slashing open his knee and allowing Peter a scant few seconds to win in a record 2hrs 18min 00secs.

The women's race saw two former world junior champions go head to head. Australia's Lisa Mathison won world junior titles in 2002 and 2003 and Karapoti in 2004, but this year she had to bow to Karapoti newcomer and 2004 world junior champion Nathalie Schneitter from Switzerland. Although in an amusing aside Nathalie didn't know she was leading until the top of Devil's Staircase.

Niels Madsen knew that he was leading the Masters 50-59 age race. The world triathlon champion and sometimes-mountain biker came back to Karapoti looking to become the first 50 year old to break three hours, and it was no surprise that he did. Another triathlete, Keren Vanderboom, had fun smashing the 20k record for women in the Penny Farthing Cycles Challenge.

It was great to see more than a dozen 60-somethings in the 50k Classic, with Noel Pollard setting a new race record. But it was a bit of a worry to see so many Aussies at the top of the elite field. There were four among the top 10 men and six among the top 10 women, not to mention winning the Corporate and Trade team title in record time.

Further afield, Upper Hutt's own Alistair Rhodes racked up his 19th Karapoti and Trevor Woodward notched up a record 13th sub-three hour. Three-time winner Tim Vincent had one of those tales of the fish that got away after five punctures robbed him of a shot at a fourth win.

Karapoti continues to be something of a family affair, with brothers Mark and Paul Williams coming together from the UK and USA to ride Karapoti. And it was fitting that the Kennett brothers won the family team title again.

Every year we're blown away by the ever-increasing interest in Karapoti. The last two years we've had more than 1500 entries for the traditional 1000-rider limit. Obviously we take some of the credit, but mostly it's a result of the atmosphere created when you get so many mountain bike junkies

together in one place. The riders make this race and all we do is make sure you have a good time.

Of course, making sure you have a good time isn't always easy. The irony of organising Karapoti is that for the month or so prior we don't get much time to ride ourselves, although the eight hour stints doing course maintenance with John Cussins are always fun. But despite best efforts Karapoti isn't Karapoti without one good organisational cock-up.

What happens, for example, when the results system develops a bug 30min before the prize giving? Or what happens when key members of the crew get crook the day of registration?

Every year we're blown away by the amount of people who are keen to volunteer at Karapoti. This year we had to turn volunteers away! Some of these are people who come back every year because their partners are riding, some are riders from yesteryear who still want to be involved, some are entrants who didn't make the 1000-rider limit, and every year a few are riders who take a year off to give something back to the sport they love.

Some of course are a bit special: two years ago Carl Patton rode with a helmet camera for our TV coverage, but crashed and broke his bike trying to get "the shots". This year he spent eight hours on his feet at registration, but then went out the next day and won the Retro category. Now that's a volunteer.

Anyway, enough ranting: hope you all had a great day and look forward to seeing you next year. Saturday March 3 is the date - Karapoti is the place.



Peter Hatton gives us a run-down on his record win