

One For The Record Books

Was 2014 the fastest Karapoti in history? We think so. The last time we saw both the men's and women's fall was 2007. Before that, 1994. And you have to go back to 1994 to see a year where the record books were rewritten by so much.

Weather plays a big part at Karapoti. Race day was fine with only a slight breeze. But more importantly, a super-mild 16-degrees. You couldn't have got a better day to ride your bike, let alone race it.

The condition of Karapoti itself, however, is the main factor. This year, several old hands commented that they've never seen it dryer and never seen the bogs lower. Most years we stand at Karapoti Park watching mud-soaked bodies struggle across the finish line. This year the sight of relatively clean bodies and bikes all grinning madly as they rode down the finish chute was almost comical.

It was a great day and without doubt the fastest ever. As well as great weather and a dry course, the Regional Council and Upper Hutt City Council had helped us with a lot of course maintenance. Most of this revolved around improving 4WD rescue access, and by default it also improved the riding, especially on Deadwood Ridge.

As well as the overall records we saw a string of age group marks broken, including Karapoti's oldest record when the supposedly retired Wayne Hiscock took 92secs off Rex Humpherson's 1998 age 30-39 record with 2hrs 33min 32secs.

The conditions also saw a big contingent joining the coveted Sub-3 Hour Club, with 34 riders breaking three hours for the first time as 74 riders went under the mark in total. Only 2008 (102), 2007 (98) and 1994 (94) have seen more Sub-3's. With 19 sub-3's, Lower Hutt's Trevor Woodward remains club captain, although Wellingtonian Jason McCarty is only one behind him.

We also saw two new Karapoti Life Members inaugurated in 2014, with Wellingtonians Jonny Waghorn and Lyndsay Horton both finishing their 20th Karapoti. And as if testifying to how fast the course was, both rode their fastest ever time, with Jonny winning the 40-49 age group in 2hrs 36min 23secs and Lyndsay joining the Sub-3hr Club for the first time.

The highlights for me, however, came from the special categories. Napier's Gary Hall smashed Alex Revell's brand new cyclo-cross record by 23min with 2hrs 34min 27secs. Gary has raced Karapoti half a dozen times before, finishing as high as sixth on a mountain bike. But his cycle-cross ride was his second fastest ever and good for 11th overall!

The other ride that impressed was Aucklander, Nicola Kirkham. A year ago she and her brother James were brand new mountain bikers and keen to see what Karapoti was all about, they turned up as volunteers. This year they returned to conquer the 50k, with Nicola becoming the first woman to complete the race on a single speed.

It's also great to see families and kids getting a kick out of the "Karapoti Kids' Klassic". The creation of the 5k kids' race was simply a result of enough parents telling us we should have a kids race and eventually we gave in. That was five years ago and it continues to sell out.

For some kids, however, 5k just isn't enough. We always have a dozen or more pre-teens taking on the 20k, but this year it was cool to see nine year old Ben Mitchell riding

across the finish line with a huge grin as he became the youngest ever finisher of the feature 50k.

Ben got a lot of press for his record-breaking ride, which was great. But almost unnoticed among finishers was an equally impressive ride by 13 year old Sampson Mollan.

Sampson was a participant in the first couple of Kids' Klassics. Then he went on the finish the 20k and now the 50k. This is cool enough, but as Sampson descended Doper's Hill this year another rider in front of him crashed and knocked himself out cold. Sampson stopped another rider to wait with the injured person, and then ran back to a nearby drink station for help.

Normally, this isn't the ideal thing to do. For safety reasons you're meant to travel in the same direction as the race to the next aid station, who then radio the previous one to move up to the accident. But Sampson had passed a drink station only a kilometre or so earlier and realising the next aid station probably wouldn't be until the bottom of the hill, he ran back up the hill and got the injured rider attention earlier than he might have otherwise. For a kid only in his first year of college, it was quick and selfless thinking.

Sampson's story struck a chord with me. I've been riding and running around the place since I was seven. I'm 47 now, so it's been a while. Like Sampson, I started with kids' events and like Sampson I quickly migrated to grown-up races in search of new challenges. So I get a kick out of organising events where kids find themselves following the same road, or trail, or river, or whatever pushes their buttons. For me, that's what events are all about. That's what Karapoti is all about.

Looking ahead, in 2015 we celebrate the 30th anniversary Karapoti. Saturday 7th March... mark it in your diary now.

