

## 2003 - Karapoti Still King

For 18 years Wellington's Karapoti Classic has been renowned as New Zealand's favourite mountain bike race. 2003 was no different.

Mountain bikers from eight nations converged on this year's Giant Bicycles Karapoti Classic. But when the dust had settled, the wounds had been licked and the tall tales told, it was Kiwis who dominated their own favourite race.

Tim Vincent hasn't had much luck of late. Two years ago the Nelson professional won Karapoti so emphatically that the race looked to become his for several years to come. But four punctures the following year made him a forgotten man coming into 2003's 18th Karapoti Classic. But right from the gun the tall Nelsonian was intent on re-establishing himself as the king of Karapoti. This is his story:

*"I am always a little afraid when I race at Karapoti. It is the longest running mountain bike event in Australasia so winning it is a huge buzz, but things can also go horribly wrong - like last year when I suffered four punctures. This year, however, I had a new trick up my sleeve - a retrofit tubeless system manufactured by tubelesskit.com that virtually eliminates the risk of pinch punctures.*

*The start of the race was easy, riding with a small group up the Karapoti Gorge that included American Brian Smith and eight-time Australian champion Rob Eva. It got harder at the Warm Up Climb where Wayne Hiscock, and American Brian Smith and I got away from the rest of our group. Then going up "Deadwood" I took the front, and while initially a bit nervous about being the pace setter so early on I soon got into my own rhythm and led by 20-30s over the top.*

*As usual the The Rock Garden was wet, slippery and dangerous so I was happy to emerge at the bottom unscathed and with most of my lead still intact. I made a little time running and riding and sliding up the Devil's Staircase. But at the top I looked over my shoulder and just caught a glimpse of Wayne Hiscock 30secs or so behind.*

*I gave full gas down Big Ring Boulevard and up Dopers, but I was nervous that there were no straights where I might have a chance to look back to see if Wayne or Brian were catching me or falling further behind. I didn't want to chance it, so kept pushing hard back down Karapoti Gorge. It was only when I hit the tarseal for the last kilometre did I finally realise I was safe. I had won my second Karapoti Classic."*

Susy Pryde



Tim Vincent



Vincent clocked in at 2hrs 24min 23secs, to become the fourth fastest winner ever. Three minutes later local Upper Hutt hero Wayne Hiscock recorded his best place and time to finish four minutes clear of American Brian Smith and fast finishing Aussie Rob Eva.

Like anything in life, however, not everything at Karapoti goes to plan. Despite amazing weather and excellent course conditions, Susy Pryde fell short of Kathy Lynch's nine-year-old race record of 2hrs 49min 42secs.

A year ago Pryde impressed by coming within 5min of that in her Karapoti debut. This year she was ahead of record pace until the final 10km when a puncture robbed the Commonwealth games silver medallist.

Pryde clocked in at 2hrs 54min 16secs, three seconds faster than last year. Second placed Jennifer Smith was 14min back, but eight minutes ahead of Genevieve Whitson and Sharon Harris battled for third.

More than merely a race, Karapoti is an event for all ages and abilities. Entries ranged from 10-year-old Oliver Le Maitre to 62-year-old Harold Alcock. Uni-cyclist Ken Looi clocked an amazing 4hrs 28min for the 50km, a time that left almost half the field behind him. Garth Weinberg who rode a single speed bike to an impressive 2hrs 56min 12secs.

The final word, however, spoke for all Karapoti entrants when two Aucklanders trailed across the line in seven hours and promptly announced that they'd be back next year. Them and almost a thousand others!