



Words: Graeme Simpson

They reckon that singlespeeding is hard and painful. Well, it can be hard, but after you get the hang of it, it's just like riding a bike. And as for the painful part, once you get caught up in the colourful menagerie of the Singlespeed champs nothing seems to hurt (unless you have an inappropriate costume). *Garth Weinberg, Rotorua, multiple New Zealand Singlespeed champion, past Australian Singlespeed champion and 2010 Singlespeed world champion.*

The most unusual event on the New Zealand mountain bike calendar? Maybe.

The national single speed championships are definitely the most colourful - with tattoos for the winning man and woman, beer short cuts, outrageous costumes and big, noisy spectator crowds.

The Rotorua Singlespeed Society organised the 1st Pig and Whistle New Zealand Championships in 2008 and ran them again in 2009 and 2013 - as well as the Singlespeed World Championship in 2010.

The nationals are always on the weekend closest to Anzac Day. In 2015, with the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli, it seemed an appropriate time for the 1st Anzac Singlespeed Championships.

The weekend began at 5.30AM on Anzac Day when over 100 bikers gathered at the Pig and Whistle for the Society's ride to the dawn service at Ohinemutu on the shores of Lake Rotorua. There were all sort of bikes - not just single speeds - and riders from all over New Zealand. They were joined by most of the big crew from Australia in town for the race, to ride the legendary Whakarewarewa trails and enjoy the Anzac camaraderie.

Race day, Sunday April 26, dawned under gloomy skies, but the weather cleared by race start at 10AM. This was a giant game of Bullrush - riders with even plates at one end of the paddock running to their bikes at the other end. Odds, vice versa.

To prepare for a single speed race you practice some riding, maybe drink a few more beers than usual, a lot of people put hours of planning and prep into their costume and you think you're good.

However, as I found out, I'd not prepared for the most important part of the race - BIKE recognition. You need to be able to remember what your bike looks like laying on its side and then visualise that picture in your brain when scanning the scene of bikes laid everywhere to remember where it is and then recognise it.

Clearly, this is not my forte - even when there were only two bikes left on the even numbered side, I only recognised my bike after someone had picked up the second last bike and only my bike was left.

Sure, it meant that I didn't get a terrific start and I was part of a very colourful conga line for quite some time. But that had its advantages.

There is only 1st and equal 2nd in these races and my chance of winning was long gone, but I had equal second tied down. In the conga line the heckling was running thick and fast, both handed out and received. This is where the real Singlespeed race action lies. *Brett Bellchambers, Canberra, Australia. 24-hour Solo Singlespeed World Champion.*

Meanwhile, at the sharp end of the race, a first timer was challenging a legend of New Zealand singlespeeding. Carl Jones, aka Spiderman, also from Rotorua and one of the country's top cross-country pilots vs Garth Weinberg.



IMAGE: ALICK SAUNDERS

THE INFAMOUS & CROWD PLEASING STREAM CROSSING

The pair traded the lead for three, tough, 11-kilometre laps, including climbs that left many of the field walking.

Carl emerged from the forest with a healthy advantage as the rain came down again. He still had to down another Speight's.

As he struggled, Garth charged into the beer short cut. Experience showed as he shot-gunned his beer. Just not quick enough to prevent Carl from taking a very narrow win.

Garth was typically gracious in defeat. He's that kind of man.

The roar from the big crowd at the stream crossing on the Rosebank trail, close to the end of the course, continued as the other riders completed their final lap.

What made the race a standout for me was its originality. There is nothing quite like it.

For a heckler on the sideline, it was heaven - ultimate entertainment providing guaranteed

hilarity at the infamous stream crossing. The roar from the crowd was electric. My sides were splitting with laughter.

As a sponsor, the social media was constant; the buzz around the community was ripe. Word of mouth is king and there was plenty of that.

I was a mere spectator, but I now have an overwhelming compulsion to take part. I don't own a singlespeed and have never even ridden one. That says it all really. You've cracked it. *James Alexander, Ray White Rotorua, one of the race sponsors with the Bayfair office and keen mountain biker.*

As the sun came out, Katie O'Neill was among the riders rolling in. She is Carl's partner and also one of our best cross-country riders. She's recovering from injury and made it very clear she just wanted to dress up and have fun. Tattoo? No way.

Her competitive streak came out, though, and



OVER 100 BIKERS GATHERED FOR ANZAC DAY DAWN PARADE

IMAGE: ALAN OROSKI

NZBIKEMAG.CO.NZ

ROB LEE AND ET



IMAGE: ALICK SAUNDERS

JONNY WAGHORN
ALIEN RESURRECTION



IMAGE: ALICK SAUNDERS

KARL FITZPATRICK
COMPLETE WITH
PINK GATORS



IMAGE: ALICK SAUNDERS

CARL JONES
AKA SPIDERMAN
CLAIMS VICTORY



IMAGE: ALAN OFOSKI

so did her class. She rode in slo-mo up to beer tent and, in the end, had to be helped across the finish line.

MC Ra Bhana asked her if she'd take the tattoo. If not the title would go to the next woman across that line.

She reluctantly - and bravely - accepted.

I was so blessed to be a part of Sunday's race - it reminded me of how special singlespeeding is to be a part of - and the big thing for me was the reconnection with the people I love. Tino arohanuitia ake tonu ake. *Rawiri Bhana, Master of Ceremonies.*

The winners were sorted and heading to be inked. According to single speed tradition all the other riders did very well and were 2nd equal.

There are few actual rules to singlespeed racing - don't take yourself too seriously is one of them.

The riders all understand that, including one of the L-plate, no-beer entries.

Three days after dad [Kevin] built me a singlespeed bike, and I'd been for my first ride in the trees on it, I decided I wanted to give the champs a go.

It was a chance to race a different type of MTB riding than I am used to. It was awesome going into it, knowing there would be a lot of laughs and fun, and no intense pressure to get a placing. I'll definitely be back next time. *Dylan Walton aged 12, Rotorua.*

Others agreed.

My mate and I came up from Wellington to do the event for the first time and brought our families with us. We had a fantastic long

weekend on and off the trails.

Having prepped for the champs on the hills of Wellington, I thought I'd be well ready for the course. Your track designers proved me wrong. I found the 3rd lap tough going - especially on those sneaky, uphill switchbacks. This was more than offset by the festival atmosphere, the great costumes, the friendly volunteers, awesome organisation, the antics of that weird breed that is single speeders and everyone else who helped make it such a unique way to celebrate 100 years of the ANZACs...and it was sweet to come second equal. *Rob Lee (plate #13).*

With beer, mtb and fancy dress, this was too good to be true. I rigged up my old 1990s varsity bike (minus the rear brake) and tracked down a mankini and a Santa suit.

I did feel for the parents of children who witnessed the beer-swiggling santa-kini. May they not be scarred for life with that sight - and, thankfully, even without a rear brake, I was scar less at the end, as well. Ho ho ho. *Pete Edmondson, Tauranga.*

I loved the spirit, I loved the camaraderie, I loved the informality. I loved the culture. I loved the beer, I loved the costumes. Yes, I loved it. *Karl McKnight, Rotorua.*

It's not just the riders who feel this way.

It always brings out the weird and wonderful. Sculling beer and riding 10km loops with only one gear appeals to almost no one. To see a couple of hundred people enter this race obviously means something special.

2015 has to be the best national singlespeed champs I've been to - yet.

Takurua Mutu, race bike scrutineer. Owner, Mountain Bike Rotorua and Event Director, Crankworx Rotorua.

Wouldn't miss this for anything - the highlight of the MTB calendar, organised to perfection by a crazy committee. Love the casual atmosphere, the chaotic, confused start, fancy dress, the laughs, the incredible talent for sculling beer that some riders have and so much more.

Each year the event gets crazier and the costumes better (boo-hiss to those who don't get into the spirit) and it's getting harder to do better than perfect. *Paddi Hodgkiss, Rotorua, beer tent volunteer, with her husband Pat, since 2008.*

Costumes are always a very big part of the event. 2015 was no exception - with only a few outbreaks of the dreaded Lycra virus.

The top three:

Whanganui's Wayne Gedye was in an astronaut suit with fire-extinguisher-fuelled rocket contrails. Maxime Bruneau from France was Jesus on the Cross. And Jonny Waghorn from Wellington was Alien.

They shared a Rotorua Experience swag bag from Agroventures, OGO, Let's Ride, Polynesian Spa, Raceline Karting and YHA TREKs Rotorua.

Duncan Appleton, from Whanganui won the NzolRide Central Surly Karate Monkey after a game of heads or tails at a rowdy prize giving at race HQ at the Pig and Whistle in downtown Rotorua.

Winner of a city cruiser bike from Ray White Rotorua and Bayfair was Bernadette Mark from Auckland. She had a free entry from Nduro

Events, but insisted on donating \$100 to the event's charities, the RSA and Kidney Health New Zealand.

The difference between this event and all others really boils down to the emotion, excitement and entertainment for riders and spectators, created by the organisers.

A few other events get close, but none seem to succeed quite as well. As a photographer shooting these events since 2008, I continue to do so - not for any commercial gain - but because the whole event is just huge fun and for worthy charities. *Mike Breen, Auckland, one of the outstanding event photography team.*

The Rotorua Singlespeed Society has a long history of making large donations to charity, including over \$5000 to the Cancer Society in 2013.

In 2015 the beneficiaries will be the RSA and Kidney Health New Zealand.

One of the Society's committee members, Lance Tavinor, is donating a kidney to his brother, Grant.

"What Lance is doing puts everything else into perspective," said Paul Laing from the Society. "He's a mate and in Rotorua we help our mates out. The same with the RSA - our event is a bit silly, so it's great to make contributions to more serious causes."

Support from local businesses and organisations is essential.

"We are lucky to have long-term backing from the Rotorua Energy Charitable Trust, Nduro Events, the Pig and Whistle, RotoruaNZ.com and First Sovereign," added Laing.



IMAGE: MIKE BREEN

WAYNE GEDYE
PREPARES FOR
TAKE OFF

The Society hopes to have the event back in Rotorua for the 10th anniversary in 2018.

Wellington, Auckland and Queenstown all competed for the 2016 champs hosting rights after this year's race. This involved beer, 16" wheeled bikes and spinning around with a broomstick held vertically above the nose (try it - it's much harder than it sounds). Queenstown prevailed.

And the spirit of singlespeeding lives on.

For more photos and video of the mayhem: [facebook.com/2015AnzacSinglespeedChamps](https://www.facebook.com/2015AnzacSinglespeedChamps).

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