





DOOMED (AKA THE SINGLESPEED CREED)
THERE IS NO HOPE
THERE WILL BE NO MERCY
WE ARE DOOMED
ALL OF US
TO A LIFE OF UNTOLD . . .
HAPPINESS
FRIVOLITY WILL DOG OUR EVERY
STEP
JOYOUSNESS WILL STORM,
UNINVITED, INTO OUR NIGHTS
BEHOLD! A PLAGUE OF BLISS IS
UPON US
THIS IS OUR FATE
ITS TERMINAL
ACCEPT IT
WE ARE DOOMED.
**BY NEILL GORDON (HAWKES
BAY JOURNALIST AND POET).**

THE RACER AND THE SHIRKER: NZO 2011 NEW ZEALAND SINGLESPEED CHAMPIONSHIPS

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE BREEN, ALAN OFSOSKI, SUE BREEN

THE RACER: I had never been to Eskdale but had heard good things. I had not been to Napier since I tried to ride there from Auckland in the early 80s (I got as far as Taupo and boarded a bus) and could not remember much (it was the 80s). When Hawke's Bay MTB Club stepped up to host the Nationals I thought it high time to go across to the Bay and have a look. The singlespeed had been hanging in the shed since the Worlds but it got out for a quick refresher course in the weeks leading up to the Nationals, and it even got fresh (and tubeless!) tyres as a special treat. There is not much else can be done to make a singlespeed race-ready.

THE SHIRKER: In the event village, across the river from the race start and with not much over 25 minutes gone, reigning world champion and vice-commodore of the RSSS, Garth Weinberg charges through with Mikey Northcott, New Zealand XC rep, hard on his rear wheel. This is going to be good.

First Woman, Brenda 'Bob' Clapp, another top Kiwi rider in 'normal' XC, isn't far behind.

There is the usual rich and creative range of costumes – like Pac Man, a whole team of Mutant Teenage Ninja Turtles and Jesus on a bike and the Easter Bunny, matching the Easter-themed event shirts and the bike on a cross hanging from a tree in the village.

THE RACER: What G fails to explain, launching straight into his race report, is that we had to cart our bikes across a pleasant (but knee-deep) river prior to reporting back to the start. Various tactics were employed by entrants to keep dry shoes available, but most of us just got wet. Then we were told by Vicki that we would need to find an Easter egg in the meadow across the stream, and that without a wrapper to show the women dressed as cows who were guarding the entrance to the race course (and our bikes) we would not proceed. Vicki then said 'go', sort of mid-sentence, and after a short pause to gather our wits, the charge to the river was on. We got down the river bank without getting killed, found that knee-deep doesn't really describe the depth when there are a hundred people running, and then found a golden Easter egg in fairly short order. I scarfed the contents (mustn't litter) hurled the wrapper at the first cow, and then couldn't find my bike. Eventually I tracked it down (it hadn't gone far) and hit the trail.



THE SHIRKER: There is something about Singlespeed racing that brings out the silliness. But it also brings out some serious racing.

I've been to the 2008 and 2009 New Zealand Singlespeed Champs (in Rotorua), the 2008 Singlespeed Worlds in Napa, California and SSWC10 in Rotorua.

All four races were exciting, with close, skilled and super fast racing at the sharp end. Remember Garth vs. Rad Ross Schnell in Rotorua last year – decided by seconds.

Napier doesn't disappoint – as the four laps are counted off, there is nothing in it between Mike and Garth. In the end, Mike Northcott is the new champion and a fresh palette for the tattoo artist back in town.

Garth is close behind and wins the Old Buggers category. Next big stop for him is Ireland in August, where he'll defend his World Champ title and tatt at SSWC11 in Ballyhoura (www.sswc2011.ie), supported by the RSSS and Bike Vegas.

Brenda Clapp takes the women's title and tattoo (and also the Old Buggers women's category) with Janine Cavanagh second.

The rest all did very well – like Gaz from main sponsor, NZO and the RSSS.

THE RACER: Don't know about you, but a bike race for me is a feeble attempt to ride on the edge of the total systemic collapse that kicks in after the

inevitable too-fast start. In a mountain bike race this is complicated by unknown terrain, other riders' ideas of how fast we should be going, and on this occasion, three-quarters of an Easter egg jammed in my carburettor. Yes, yes, I know: we are only here for fun, it is the singlespeeds, people are dressed as clowns (scary ones), etc, but it is still a race. So we spend the next few hours in cross-eyed discomfort trying not to laugh/throw up.

THE SHIRKER: At prizegiving back in Napier at the Speight's Ale House at Ahuriri, north of the city's port, familiar names are read out, with many of the usual suspects from previous New Zealand champs.

It's a great group of people, riding for the crack, the beer and the good company – typical singlespeeding (and most of mountain biking, really).

Tony Harding rode the race dressed as the Easter Bunny with a massive head that restricted his vision and on a Raleigh 20, mysteriously rebranded 'all-terrain cougar'.

Tony was one of the original Kiwi singlespeeders, a pioneer who did what Garth does now: turn up at regulation MTB events and spank most of the field on geared bikes on his 1-speed. Respect.

Tony helped design the course at Eskdale. The consensus among the riders, many riding this network for the first time, was:



excellent trails, narrow, rooty and technical, tough, but fair – and a good challenge for the very best, as well as the sifters out the back.

THE RACER: One of the cool things about a singlespeed race is the 'shortcut'. At the organiser's discretion, a shortcut is allowed, but it passes through a tent full of militant cows (actually the same very nice women dressed as cows, but cows-in-charge, one armed with a whip). These cows dispense beer, and you have to drink it to use the shortcut. Otherwise, go the long way. The first lap was rumoured to have eggs in place of beer, and worse, they were raw eggs. So I went the long way. Turned out they were Easter eggs (again!) and I needn't have bothered. Still, the long cut was a cool bit of trail I might otherwise have missed, and I was not exactly hanging out for more Easter eggs. In fact, I was still sort of dealing with the first one, which by now I was thinking I should have spat at the first gang of cows.

LAST WORDS

THE SHIRKER: what a superb weekend, including the race. Napier is a beautiful bike-friendly place, the hospitality was outstanding and Vicki and the Hawke's Bay Mountain Bike Club did a top job herding the cats.

When we first started the RSSS and ran the first official NZ Singlespeed Champs

at Anzac Weekend in 2008, no one really knew how it would go. It went well. It was the same with Rotorua again in 2009 and Queenstown in 2010.

And the 2010 Singlespeed Worlds in Rotorua were a success, too.

Long may the spirit survive – wherever the NZ champs are on Anzac weekend, 2012.

THE RACER: We strung out around the course and each found our natural spot on the ladder of cardiovascular efficiency/tolerance to beer and chocolate-covered marshmallow, and discovered that the course was almost perfect for singlespeeds.

A long grovel up a fire road was followed by a much longer traverse across a steep bit of forested hillside, which was fast and

flowing, but peppered with sharp pitches up and down to keep things interesting. Once eggs were off the menu, shortcuts made sense – and after a couple of those nothing else did. Mikey and Garth lapped me just before they finished, so I got a brief look at their epic battle, and an idea of how much faster than me they were going. A lot.

The Hawke's Bay crew did a fantastic job, their bike park deserves much more investigation, and Napier turned on a great weekend while it rained back home. The Singlespeed Nationals has found a spot in the calendar and there are a bunch of people around the country keen to host one. Where it goes next will be announced as soon as we have figured that out, but I look forward to lining up at the start.

