

1 BIG DAY IN THE WHAKAREWAREWA FOREST...

THE 2015 ANZAC SINGLESPEED CHAMPIONSHIPS, ROTORUA

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CARL JONES PUT ALL HIS SPIDEY SENSES TO THE TEST TO TAKE THE WIN



KATIE O'NEILL - THE ACCOUNTANT



MAXIME BRUNEAU - JESUS



WAYNE GEDYE - NASA ASTRONAUT

Chaos at the start and a race that wasn't over till a final chug of beer.

The 2015 Anzac Singlespeeds was all that...and much, much more. One of the country's top young cross-country pilots, Carl Jones, would take his first title tattoo. But only after a ding-dong, straight out battle with singlespeed legend, Garth Weinberg. He's a multiple New Zealand champion, past Australian champion and Singlespeed world champion on his home trails in 2010. Let's just say the man is well inked.

Garth knew Carl was coming for him. But the wily old fox got the holeshot in a predictably unpredictable start that is a trademark of these events. This time it was a mass game of Bullrush. Entrants with even numbered race plates were at one end of the paddock at Waipa with their bikes at the other end. Odd numbers, vice versa. When the flag dropped they all rushed towards each other to reclaim their bikes.

Garth lead out, narrowly avoiding a mass pile-up and with the young pretender hot on his tail. The two Rotorua riders traded blows over three, tough 11-kilometre laps, with climbs that left the rest of the 200 strong field gasping in their wake.

It really was four seasons in one day – starting with mist and drizzle, then clearing for race start at 10am. A sudden downpour halfway through made the trails slippery and more challenging, but still the dicing between the pair went on.

A huge ovation from a very big, noisy crowd greeted Carl at the stream crossing on Rosebank at the end of lap 3. Other riders commented on how they could hear the cheering there from a long way out.

He arrived at the beer short cut with Garth nowhere in sight. There was another dramatic twist to go. Carl still had to chug another Speights. He struggled. Garth emerged from the forest on a charge. He's been there before and shot-gunned his beer. It was a very close run thing with Carl just coughing back the last dregs and sliding across the line in time.

A big grin didn't leave his face all afternoon - except when he was getting inked. "It was a pretty hard, pretty solid day," he said. "I just wanted to dress up and have fun, but knew about that tattoo if I won." Garth was gracious in defeat, a measure of the man. "Sterling ride by Carl and I couldn't match his smooth, dulcet style through the singletrack," he commented. "I gave it my best, but his best was better than mine."

Garth was also complimentary about women's winner, Katie O'Neill: "Respect to her for the win - and being able to chop a beer faster than Carl," he added with a grin.

Katie is Carl's partner and teammate at NZXC Racing and a top Kiwi XC representative, as well. She was using the race to get some kilometres into her legs after an injury. No way did she want the tattoo.

However, it's hard to conceal true class and she cleared out from the rest of the field. With the sun shining again, Katie dawdled up to the beer tent, hoping another woman rider would pass her. In the end, she was 'escorted' over the finish line and bravely accepted the tattoo and title. Along with Carl, she also receives automatic free entry into the 2015 Singlespeed World Championships in Japan, in October. New Zealand is the only national event to have this status. All the other racers at the Anzacs did very well and were 2nd equal. While costumes always feature at Singlespeed events, 2015 saw the standard rise to a new level – with only a few outbreaks of dreaded lycra. For the event team it was impossible to separate 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. The three shared a Rotorua Experience swag bag from Agroventures, OGO, Let's Ride, Polynesian Spa, Raceline Karting and YHA TREKs Rotorua.

At a raucous prize giving at race HQ, the Pig and Whistle, that evening, Duncan Appleton, from Whanganui won the Nzo|Ride Central Surly Karate Monkey after a game of heads or tails. Bernadette Mark from Auckland was a very popular and deserving winner of a city cruiser bike from Ray White Rotorua and Bayfair. She crashed heavily during the race, but continued. She had a free entry from Ndure Events, but insisted on donating \$100 to the event's charities, the RSA and Kidney Health New Zealand.

The weekend began at 5.30am on Anzac Day with over 100 riders joining the Rotorua Singlespeed Society's traditional dawn ride to the service at Ohinemutu.

"This was four times what we've had in the past," said Society president, Gary Sullivan. "It was a wonderful turn-out of all sorts of bikers, not just one-gear, from all over New Zealand and Australia, and from kids to oldies."

Lance Tavinor from the Society's committee is donating a kidney to his brother and fellow mountain biker, Grant.

"Singlespeeding events are light-hearted and even silly, but we make sure there's always a serious side to them in Rotorua," added Paul Laing, the Society treasurer. "The causes we're donating to this year feel very personal."

And hosting rights for the 2016 New Zealand Singlespeed Championships? They were won by Queenstown - after a post-race competition involving 16" wheel bikes, beers and spinning round with a broom stick held vertically above the nose – much harder than it looked.

New Zealand Singlespeeding's heart still beats strongly.

For more photos and video of the mayhem:
facebook.com/2015AnzacSinglespeedChamps