

rotorua World champs 2006



tracey hannah



Sam and Sabrina



julian absalon



2006 4x world champion, michal prokop



World Champs - Rotorua 2006



daniel braunsteins - 6th U19 XC



Intro

"Bring the mountain to Mohammed", someone said it, it might have even been in the bible...probably wasn't. I don't care who or where really, all I know is that the World Championships came to us for a change. Well, they almost came to us, they were dragged kicking and screaming to stinky but beautiful and enchanting Rotorua in the land of the long white cloud.

complaints, there were low-points but in general, they went off and most notably impressed the internationals who claimed the event to be several thousand times better than the World's lowpoint of Lugano in Switzerland in 2003. New Zealand running a better event than Switzerland, are you out of your mind? Apparently not, as far as organisation, infrastructure and general execution, Rotorua basically took the cake as best World's in four years.

But that was just one perspective. Personally, we didn't really know what to expect. Cairns in

1996 had been huge, not in terms of spectators but just in terms of it being smack bang in the middle of the MTB hey day when we used to have expensive champagne passed to us in crystal flutes as we rode through the feed zone and were fanned by gorgeous blondes wearing one-piece bathing suits as we waited on the start line. Memory does funny things.

So ten years on...Firstly, while there was a lot of media (with nearly 200 accredited), there wasn't the opulence and fanfare of the '96 World's but that is more a reflection of the money in our sport now. It wasn't a problem seeing a small tent village set up around the race finish area but what

We travelled to New Zealand at the start of last year to suss out what our fine-feathered friends were up to with their World's preparation. They were pretty much on track then, meaning that the 4X had been built, and there was some spray paint on the trees on Mount Ngongotaha marking out the DH and XC courses. At the Oceania Championships there was still a bit of question mark hanging over the courses: the 4X wasn't providing enough passing manoeuvres, the DH course looked like it would struggle to hold up if the rain, god forbid, decided to grace us with its presence and the XC course, well, it was a bit lame and/or tame.

Given this, we were super-keen to see what changes had been executed on the courses to make them ready to see who would be champion of the World south of the equator in 2006. Sure, there would be the culture shock for everyone, the funny accents, chilli bins instead of eskis, jandals instead of thongs...but after weeks of coming to terms with this, we were ready for the main event.

In short, the event was a bloody ripper. There were

clinton avery - teams relay



Congratulations World Champion Sam Hill



photo :: Andrew Threlfall



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lopes on losing

"I'll chalk [Marosi] up as another one I'll pay back, just as Guido Tschugg is on my list to pay back. At this point in my career, I'm all done having fun and if I don't win another World Cup or another World Championship it's not going to tarnish what I've done in the past so if they want to play dirty then hey, I can play dirty too."



alex "pete murray" lloyd - practising the 4x



lloyd on being humble

"In my first heat I had some gracia dude and everyone was like, 'he's really fast' I beat him out of the gate so I was happy"



couldn't be ignored as soon as the first events started was that the fields were small, and seemed even smaller because of the lack of numbers in the Aussie team. But hey, at least the stars were here and that's what it's all about right? Just wandering around it was so great to just brush past World Champions, legends past and present and just soak up the fact that you were in THE place to be. Let the games begin...

4X - Mountain Cross

Tragedy hit the World Championships before they had even begun when Renee Junga crashed in practice, damaging her spinal cord and leaving her a paraplegic with a very small chance of recovery (see Editor's Note). That really rocked the 4X world as riders fell apart, not able to continue to race from sadness and/or from the fact that they knew the course was pretty sketchy.

This saw the women's field deplete by nearly half including the non-start of our star rider Katrina Miller, leaving only four or so girls who were able to hit the big table-tops on the third straight. On practice days it was really interesting to watch men and women alike grapple with the course, psyching themselves up and ultimately just having to hit it. One of the most comfortable guys that I've ever seen on a bike, Amiel Cavalier muttered up the top of the course that he was quietly shitting himself. His Giant teammate Tara Llanes wasn't so quiet about it. After a day of practice though, the top women were absolutely boosting and this was possibly more impressive than seeing guys like Lopes and Prokop dial the course.

Come race day, the mountain was packed and the unbelievably kind weather was spraying the course with bright sunlight. The racing was awesome and benefited hugely from what was rumoured to be some Glenn Jacobs magic which created quite a few more passing on a course which was otherwise largely the same as it was at the Oceania's.

These passing opportunities saw some huge upsets with both Gracia and Lopes not making the final. To be honest, Lopes was quite disappointing as he went down in what seemed on re-examination to be a pretty fair move but then proceeded to gesture with dismay at the corner commissaire and then roll down without so much as a final show-off manoeuvre before spaying some verbal ammo to anyone who wanted to

listen: "Roger (Rinderknecht - Switzerland) got a good start and we were going into the first turn. I didn't want to slam him, so I just let him go. I slotted in behind him and coming into the second turn I was behind him again. He kind of squared up a bit to get the inside line but I went in as far as I could...you know, that's the only way to pass and fucking Marosi...I think he just jumped and just ploughed right into me. My speed was pretty good on the track but again, from the start I knew anything could happen on this course - there's like three turns that someone could take you out on and ruin your day if they want to and that's what Marosi wanted to do to me so I'll chalk him up as another one I'll pay back, just as Guido Tschugg is on my list to pay back. At this point in my career, I'm all done having fun and if I don't win another World Cup or another World Championship it's not going to tarnish what I've done in the past so if they want to play dirty then hey, I can play dirty too."

...saucer of milk, table two...Meeeeeowww!

In stark contrast to Lopes was Gracia who got kind of stiffed but made the crowd roar with some big moves

including sending himself on a NASA journey off the wall ride. Wonder why everyone loves Gracia...?

Anyway, the finals were awesome with Prokop showing he really is the best four crosser in the world and Jill Kintner showing the same despite some fierce competition from Anneke Beerten who took silver (and may have taken gold in the hottest 4X racer competition). The finals weren't completely clean though with Dan Atherton getting axed in the final by Tschugg which actually did give the Brit something to whinge about, but he didn't. The crowd absolutely loved the event and the amount of traffic caused by the event created the first traffic jam in Rotorua history - props!

A big hole in the competition was that Jared Graves was out with injury. It killed him to watch the racing knowing that four weeks ago he was cleaning up everyone in four cross and was as fit as he'd ever been...next year I suppose for Graves who turned his efforts to being the rowdiest Aussie supporter in Rotorua.

sid taberlay - elite xc



sauser leading absalon



XC - Cross Country

The XC course was really safe. Big climb, traverse, little descent, little climb, descent, finish lap. The course was spruced up slightly with a rock garden and some bedding in of the more sketchy parts of the course but it was still fairly uninteresting. However, that's what the UCI want. They want boring courses. If you try and get funky they tell you to make a new one so the Rotorua crew had their hands somewhat tied.

In any case, the racing was fantastic. The big climb really sorted everyone out from the start and ensured that there was no hiding in packs of riders. Anyone who was up the front was either bloody strong or living on borrowed time.

The highlights of the XC was definitely seeing Daniel Braunstiens give it to the Euros by finishing 6th in U19 category. Braunstiens was stuck with an Italian and French rider with half a lap to go and was looking good for fourth but the other two just sat on him and jumped him before the final downhill - an impressive ride nonetheless.

In the U23 race, Dan McConnell couldn't quite pull off a repeat of his 9th place in Livigno in last year's race, ending up 31st nearly 15 minutes of the pace. The best thing about the U23 was probably seeing first year U23 Lachlan Norris chug around the course. Norris ended up 36th putting in a sterling ride and obviously really enjoyed himself out on course with a smile plastered across his muddying face.

The Elite men's race was an absolute ripper with Julien Absalon having to wait until the last lap to break clear of a super-hungry Christoph Sauser to take his third consecutive World Championship. Absalon started slowly as Kessiakoff bolted out of the gate followed by Ralf Naf. The cool, calm and collected Absalon was poker faced for nearly all of the two hour race until he opened the can of whup-ass and put a solid 43 seconds into a flailing and heartbroken Sauser in the last half lap. Sauser, who was second last year to Absalon, then only by 18 seconds, was almost laughing at his bridesmaids status after the finish but really had to concede he was beaten by a true champion.

Sid Taberlay and Chris Jongewaard represented strongly with Jongewaard going out hard early but fading to end up 37th while Taberlay fought his way up to 30th. Both riders were shattered after the event with Jongewaard's first words after finishing being "I don't want to play anymore", he soon forgot these words and started the Tour of the Murray River road tour the next day in Victoria... figure that guy out, sucker for punishment.

The glaring omission from the XC races had to be that there were no Aussie female's representing the green and gold. It was a real pity and whatever reason they weren't in attendance, they were sorely missed. I for one, and I know many others, want to see our women out there on course. Come back ladies!

Maybe they were put off by Gunn-Rita Dahle-Flesjaa who absolutely tore the elite women's field apart to take her 900th World Championship, it is a possibility, that woman absolutely hauls and has to be seen to be believed.



chris jongewaard



gunn-rita's legs



absalon good for 3



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nathan reddie

DH - Downhill

Without a doubt, the DH was the premier event of the week. Everyone was talking about it and pretty much everyone was watching it, be it practice, seeding or just a wander up the course, people were so into it. It could be said that downhill is starting to get a bit overrated when you compare spectator numbers for the XC final and the DH final - especially given the fact that the XC races were so damn impressive.

I do understand on the other hand how it is pretty damn fun to go and hang out in a tree with your buddies and watch tens of riders either axe themselves in the steepest downhill section or see Sam Hill or Greg Minaar straightline a section without actually touching the ground more than three or four times in an 80m section on a 45% incline. It does have its attractions.

The course was in mint condition and the rain had held off. The stars were in attendance, people were asking Steve Peat if he could hold it together, people were asking Sam Hill what he was going to say in his acceptance speech and people were generally wondering whether things would have been more clean-cut if Fabien Barel had been able to race, given that he broke Hill's heart by beating him at the Oceania Games on the same course. There was also talk of if it was possible to fit 5 Aussies on the top three steps in the final. The Aussie talent is so hot it almost seemed to be a formality as to who would actually take what colour medal.

I know that sounds conceited but...well, look at the result. It was less arrogance than realism. Anyway, the day arrived with blue skies and a superb track which allowed Tracey Hannah to take the World Championship that was rightfully hers. The little pocket rocket looked so composed all the way down the course as she guided herself through the dangers and pedalled like a demon when she had to. The result: a four second win and a new rainbow jersey.

The juniors weren't so lucky but put in a solid performance with James 'Elbows out' Maltman taking fifth, eight seconds off the pace with Mitch Delfs, Ben Bell and Alex Swann slipping into 7th, 9th and 11th respectively - a super strong ride by the young lads. Kiwi junior, Cameron Cole, put in a sterling ride to win the race but was obviously too exhausted from his 3:28 effort to smile on the podium without being prompted by media - what will it take to make that kid happy!?

The long awaited final came and Sabrina Jonnier did what needed to be done in the Ironhorse camp by taking a three-second win over Tracey Moseley who had reversed the result at the Oceania Championships. Rachel Atherton won the bronze in her first year senior and also won the hearts of a lot of fans, apparently.

With the skies threatening rain, the men started to come down. Dan Atherton was an early leader before Chris Kovarik made the skinsuit work for him to take fastest time. From then on the times tumbled until 6th last rider Sam Hill absolutely destroyed everyone with a 3:11.03. Whether by design or not, Hill's time chinese whispered its way up the course and probably into the ears of the last few riders, freaking them out. The result, no-one got within four seconds of his time and he became the new World Champion without more than a cheeky little grin. Did I mention that Hill didn't wear a patch of body armour? DH helmet, goggles, gloves, skinsuit, shoes...so bold, so confident, the race was his before he even started.

It says a lot for our downhill program that Hill, Rennie, Kovarik and Hannah were all in the top six. It freaks people out, and well it should. Finally, Hill had nabbed our first elite gold medal at a World Championships and it looks like it wont be the last.



chris kovarik





jk's swan song

the bump

The weather was extremely kind, the race organisers were kinder, the town was warm and welcoming, the tracks did their job, the riders did their job and the media were there to capture it. Whichever way you look at it, the event was a success and just goes to show that the southern hemisphere can do it just as well if not better than the north. With fingers crossed, we won't have to wait too long until the bring the mountain back to Mohammed.



the local fun police



cedric gracia

graeme simpson

try-alls





10 minutes as the Tui flies, or 60kms by singletrack. Your choice. But if you roll out of N-zo's office and head over to the far side of the forest, there is a trail called Babyheads. You won't find it on a map, in fact you won't find it at all unless you are a total trailhound. It is small but perfectly formed, not strictly legal, and is the perfect place for a Tuesday afternoon product testing mission.

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