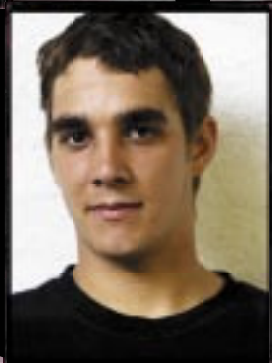


# TWO HEROES RACED



ALL PICS: LUCAS

**WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 2006,  
ROTORUA, NEW ZEALAND**  
PHOTOS BY VICTOR LUCAS, GARY PERKIN, GRAEME MURRAY,  
CHRIS HERRON & TANJA BORGSCHULTE



# HEROES RSE

You know we did mean to go (there is a long list of excuses) but blah, blah, blah...but we didn't. Which is a big shame, the World Championships is special, it really is that 'pressure-pot' race, a race that some love and have the ability to rise to the occasion, whilst others simply crumble and collapse. The current world champion Fabien Barel was on a roll and looking to make it three rainbow jerseys in a row in New Zealand, but an accident somewhere in Scandinavia literally shattered his hopes. Barel has shown over the last two years that he can focus all of his efforts for this one race and come up with the goods, something that most can't.

For the last two years he has been flanked on either shoulder on the podium by Sam Hill and Greg Minnaar. Sam picking up a silver last year with Greg getting the bronze, they switched places the year before for a bit of a change. Both of these riders are destroyers, racers through and through. They too can concentrate all their efforts on this one race, it is just that for the last two years Barel has been quicker, simple as that. Of course there are others out there, but after Steve Peat's spin out in Les Gets in 2004 I try not to think too much about his chances. Of course he can do it, but he doesn't need me worrying about it. There are plenty of others, but at the worlds it is only the top three on the podium and not the usual five, and there haven't been that many riders up there. Apart from Peat, Hill and Minnaar only Chris Kovarik, Matti Lehtikoinen, Mick Hannah, Gee Atherton, Cedric Gracia and Nathan Rennie have been on the top three rungs of the podium this year at World Cup level, but this is the World Champs, and for some reason it is different.

A day earlier I had placed my bet on the Littermag.com online poll, firmly sticking my neck out (under a pseudonym of course). I patriotically went for Peat (well you have to don't you?), then either Minnaar or Hill (I can't remember in which order now). But you know I had heard that the course was good but that it would suit a rider who could pedal, more than likely someone who was clipped in and could carry their speed well. Even the photos of the track that I had seen earlier in the week looked a little like the UK, so I felt pretty safe laying it down that Peaty would take the win. Minnaar of course is a great athlete, is clipped in, runs a single pivot bike, is super pro and has a great team behind him...so he was a pretty safe bet too. And then of course Sam Hill...well you can never rule him out...can you.

So there I am at 8.30am on Saturday August 26th, checking through my emails looking for the one from the UCi, and there it was, 'Mountain Bike World Championships - Rotorua - DH

Elite Men Results'. I'm trying build the tension here, but as you can imagine it is a little difficult. Sam Hill...whoa...by 4.22 seconds...whoa. Hold up, I thought this was meant to be a course suited to the tap dancers. Minnaar next, then Rennie, good old Rennie. And Peaty? Tucked in in fourth, seven seconds back from Hill. Fourth is a bad place to be, you come away with absolutely nothing. But Hill, that is amazing, "My run was flawless. I tried to be smooth, not lose too much time in the technical bits, and start pedalling right away when I was through them." He must have been pedalling like a mad man. Maybe this is now the start, the run of domination (two weeks later he was to destroy the Elite field again, this time by over five and a half seconds at the final round of the World Cup). I have never doubted his confidence and I don't think that he ever doubted his own ability, and from what I hear he actually managed to crack a smile when he won. There is a focus and determination that is almost off-putting about Hill this year, he has the eyes of a trained killer, steady and knowing. I really do have a feeling that this is just the start. He is happy with the bike, is on great team and he knows that when he wants to he can win by devastating margins. When you win by so many seconds you are not just beating the opposition, you are obliterating them.

So Peaty had blown it, no medals yet. What about the women, and the Juniors, they went of earlier in the day, surely Brendan Fairclough had taken gold? A quick scroll down on the emails and there were the women's results. Great results for the GB team. We got the cake, the icing but sadly not the cherry. Sabrina Jonnier (who has on so many occasions been in the shadow of the all conquering Anne Caroline Chausson) had deservedly taken gold and the jersey by three and a half seconds. Hold up a minute. Jonnier and Hill, not quite the Posh and Becks of our sport, but definitely an 'item', and team-mates to boot. I can just imagine their team manager Sean Heimdal thinking to himself, with a wry smile on his face, "yeah, I thought that might happen". If we are not careful world domination really is upon us.

Tracy was happy, Rachel ecstatic. But what about Brendan? He's nowhere to be seen. But there he was back in seventeenth. Turns out that he had to go around the water jump up top after messing up the section before it. New Zealand one and two, Cole from Blenkinsop, who it appears was the favourite after Brendan, but he too crashed but managed to get back on it. But look, Ralph Jones sitting there in fourth, just 0.30 off the bronze medal, good work. And the Junior women? Tracey Hannah (yeah Mick's sister) stormed it by over four and a half seconds. Slightly worrying though that there were no junior British riders over there.

So yeah, we didn't go, instead we were reduced to computer geek spectators, picking up scraps of information as and when we could. That was it, my World Championships all done and dusted in about two minutes, I hadn't even had a morning cup of tea. Someone asked me the other day whether I thought they should clip-in. I think your answer could lie here. If both Hill and Rennie can podium at the highest level of our sport riding flats...well there's your answer. But the World Championships is not about who clips in and who doesn't (that talk can be left for the bar afterwards). The World Championships is about the Rainbow Jersey. The gold medal will go in the drawer, but the Rainbow Jersey is special, it is a signal to everyone else out on the hill that you are the best, that you held it together and that you beat them all. It is almost like a target, saying 'come and shoot me down'. Over the last ten years only four other men have taken the title (Nico Vouilloz, Myles Rockwell, Greg Minnaar and Fabien Barel) and only two women (Anne Caroline Chausson and Vanessa Quin), this is a rare and highly prized item. For the next 12 months nothing can take that away from Sam Hill and Sabrina Jonnier, it actually means something, it is real and it is fact. And everyday it reminds their fellow riders that they were the ones, that on the day they did it, and it is pure magic.

Mike Rose.

**I DID HAVE GREAT PLANS OF GETTING UP AT FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING TO CHECK OUT THE RESULTS. OR THEN I THOUGHT THAT MAYBE I COULD STAY UP UNTIL FOUR TO SEE WHAT HAD HAPPENED. YOU SEE, THIS YEARS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS (THE PINNACLE OF OUR SPORT) WAS BEING HELD IN NEW ZEALAND, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD, AND A FULL 11 HOURS AHEAD OF US. EITHER WAY IT DIDN'T HAPPEN. I DIDN'T MAKE THE FOUR O'CLOCK SHOUT, EITHER EARLY OR LATE.**

The Larches' was this steep, tough, woods section. With spectators crammed in to every available viewing spot the atmosphere was a big lift to the riders especially the All Blacks.

## ALEX RANKIN

ALEX RANKIN IS THE FILMER/CREATOR/DIRECTOR/PRODUCER (EVERYTHING BASICALLY) OF THE EARTHED SERIES OF FILMS AND DIRT'S HOW-TO DVD FUNDAMENTALS. HE WORKS ON THE DIRT/4130 STAFF AND IS A WORLD CUP AND WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS REGULAR.

What 26 hour flight! It's only a day away and without leaving your English speaking comfort zone New Zealand it the perfect MTB destination. Going fast and living on the edge is in the blood here, from producing MX stars, £60 skydives and the worlds fastest Indian\*, It should get you in the mood for riding. During my travels in NZ I found there is a proud history of downhill racing and finally as the sport matures this nation can celebrate MTB with a major event.

From a start house decorated in Maori sculptures my first decent of the track was halted by a snow storm, a harsh reminder that this was still winter in NZ and that the weather could be a major player in the weekends events. Thirty minutes pass and a solid blue sky proved to be much better for filming and the first of many possible shots from the top section of the course. This was a steep flowing gassy section into a fast right hander to a water jump which was causing a few problems for the riders, the boggy run up being the biggest hassle, I saw Rennie hit the jump fast only to lose all his speed on the lip. A big nose dive to wash out followed, others were less lucky, it was a "Case-o-rama", even Minnaar was caught out with a huge case, which might have the Honda techs scratching their heads. The result was a complete graveling of the boggy run up which made this section more like Willengen, but at least the jump would be rideable. However this was still a key section of the course for the guys, because getting the fast right-hander good before the jump was essential as the course depended on carrying good speed into the mellow or flatter sections.

The theme of the course over all could be described as Steep, flat, steep, flat. The hot section for filming was 'the Larches', a super steep wooded area, which in the dry was tough to ride clean, purely due to the gradient. However after a heavy night time downpour the second mornings practice was chaos, most of the chicks could only slide down on their bums, and those like Tracy and Sabrina tried to ride it but ended up in the netting or sliding on their bums anyway. It was here that Rach Atherton managed to pop her shoulder out just pushing her bike up for another run. I guess the extra mud on bike put a load of stress through the shoulder that first let her down in Livigno last year.

Later that morning the Larches had barley dried out by the time elite men's practice started, Cedric and Matti on the scene early, mud specialists maybe but still this section proved tough. Until Matti, on his second run, shut down the whole line and opened everyone's eyes as to what is possible on a DH bike. The rest of the session followed with every top pro having some kind of slip or fall, I saw Eric Carter walking the course "shame it turned into such a crap chute", it was the perfect way to describe the section at that time. However the rain never returned and the Larches was rougher for the finals but dry enough to stay in control, if in control is what you wanted! This is DH after all.

It was there that I stayed for the Junior men's race, within ear shot of a PA speaker the hundreds, maybe a thousand fans in the woods could follow the times and watch the toughest section of course before them, every viewing spot was taken and I was forced into a new but prime filming spot, if a little risky, if any off line junior came my way I had to dive out the way, much to the gathered crowds amusement. So the pressure sure was on Brendan this year, his last chance as a junior to win the gold, all the people that follow DH know and can see he is the fastest youth on the track, but there was another, a NZ kid called Sam Blenkinsopp and he was on fire. His name was on everyone's lips, the quiet shredder may have got to Brendan, as a crash before the water jump was fatal, I would say easily the worst place to lay it down on the track, there was no getting out of that problem. Brendan was super late arriving at the woods but what happened was that Sam Blenkinsopp, maybe knowing that the race was his for the taking, crashed right in front of me, gifting fellow NZ rider Cameron Cole the Junior gold. A solid rider for sure, of course it is the essential requirement for winning, just to keep it on two wheels.

Watching the senior women's race unfold, the pedal to the finish line looked painful, a real slog. Maybe Sabrina had the right policy, "It was really good, I started really fast and jumped stuff I never jumped before, and I did few little mistakes, but I don't care, I won. I just pedalled like crazy. Normally I'm lazy and I want to sit down, but I told myself 'don't sit down'". Sabrina smiles a big smile, but I know Tracy must be more than a little disappointed after such a strong season.

"Well it's always easy to look back and wish I could rewrite time and do things again, but hey, you make choices at the time and you have to stick with them. I definitely made a couple of bad decisions in my run that cost me time. I had been dropping the big drop in the wood all week with no problems, but after the rain the day before the race I had some issues and couldn't always get through the section clean. I knew that none of the girls

were doing it so I decided to play safe and not risk it all on this one section. That was a bad mistake, as I messed up the line going around it and lost some valuable time. Further down the track I also decided to take a jump that I knew Sabrina wasn't doing in the hope that I could gain some time. Sadly I cased it and carried no speed into the next section. These weren't decisions that I made during my run, I made them before I set off, so I can't be too mad at myself, they just didn't work out. I basically did not have a flawless run, which is pretty much what you need for a world champs title. Yes I am disappointed as I felt like I was definitely riding well enough in practice to win on the day, but the difference is, it's getting it right on the day that matters."

Surgery may soon be on the cards for fellow Brit Rachel Atherton but for her first year in senior women a third place result is even more impressive considering the drama she has battled through.

In the senior men's race seeding runs looked pretty normal, compared to the gaming around of previous years, most riders didn't pedal much, just a roll down for Rennie and Steve seeding in first and second, Sam and Greg both in the top ten. But come race day the weather looked dark for the top ten men, the light dropped so much that the camera was set to wide open, Kirkcaldie and Minnaar said it was hard to see in the woods, impossible to spot the braking bumps between thousands of camera flashes. Knowledgeable fans lined the whole course with maybe enough collective goodwill in their minds that a savage rain storm, which should have been ruining the final run, was somehow avoided.

Steve Peat in fourth, "I knew it had dried up a lot and I tried to push harder but I was late on every turn, it felt like the mud was dragging me down. It was just one of those runs, I'm not happy with fourth."

Rennie in third with the bronze, "At one point a big log rolled out in front of me I had to drop low to avoid it, I was pretty spent and it was hard to hit my lines, ya know. It was getting pretty chopped up and I was trying to ride different lines but I ended up just sliding out, I should have just rode the main line. But happy to get third yeah."

Greg Minnaar second and a silver medal, "I was happy with the run I had and it's not often I can say that, Sam must have had an amazing run"

And the Aussie fans that made the trip where not disappointed, a Jared Graves megaphone rendition of the Aussie national anthem drowned out the PA with the slight smile from Sam, you kinda know the best rider won on the day.

Sam Hill gold, "it's awesome, pretty flawless really, kept it smooth the whole way on all my lines and pedalled really hard, that one turn before the water jump my front wheel started drifting but I got my foot back on a saved it, The flat pedals really helped me that time. I knew the track wasn't gonna suit me with all the pedalling, and Scott Sharples (Aussie team coach) has been helping me out on all that. It's awesome to prove to all the people that said you couldn't win senior men's gold medal on flats pedals...it's been done. The fans where awesome too, the whole way down you could just hear Aussies cheering, the track is normally three metres wide in practice, in the race it was one meter wide, everyone hanging over the tape, arms in the air, cheering, it was awesome."

Glenn Jacobs, "there's faith with the whole programme. In Australia we believe at every level that our riders can win and do well. That's what it takes, a good solid base, every one believing that we can do it. As Aussies we have to travel a long way, you know if you are going to make the journey make it a good one."

So all that was left was the party, two nights of parties before most people departed and the start of the rest of my NZ adventure began. It was great to catch up with John Kirkcaldie, who after 10 years of racing at the top level has called it day a hung up his Maxxis tyres. We filmed a retirement section for Earthed 4 and it left me thinking hard about how tough it is to win and do well at the top level. A true ambassador for the sport and his country. Wanting to do well in your home country is big motivation but a few crashes in seeding and practice put a dampener on JK's final run. Likewise Vanessa Quin, with her rainbow stripe already in place the expectation from the national and local press was high, when in fact just to be competing was a huge achievement considering the injury from Vigo, with a wrist fix up job designed just so she could have a shot at this race. Again a bad crash late in practice put a dent in the Dirt team rider's confidence and the disappointment with seventh place was huge, but considering what she was battling against not such a bad job.

Alex Rankin

\*"Worlds Fastest Indian" a film with Anthony Hopkins based on the land speed records set by Invercargill resident Burt Munro, a true NZ legend



Easily the tightest turn on the course, coming in too hot was a big problem for many. A cool head kept Greg Minnaar on track for the silver.

Rennie had his Queenstown posse in town but kept things on track until after the work was done. A bronze was good but Nathan insisted later he would have been up with Sam's time had it not been for a few 'wobbles'.

MURRAY



PERKIN



PERKIN



MURRAY



## HELEN MORTIMER

HELEN MORTIMER WAS FOR A LONG TIME THE FACE OF BRITISH FEMALE DOWNHILL RACING. HE RETIRED IN 2003 AND STARTED TO WORK WITH BRITISH CYCLING. SHE WENT TO THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS WITH THE UNENVIABLE TASK OF JUGGLING TWO JOBS, THAT OF UCI TECHNICAL DELEGATE AND TEAM MANAGER TO THE GB DOWNHILL AND 4X TEAMS.

"Do you want to cover the carpet on the bridges with tarps?"  
 "Huh?"  
 "Do you want the carpet to be covered on the bridges so it doesn't have ice on it for morning training?"  
 "Err yeah, sure, do you think it will get that cold?"  
 "Well we've had snow at this time of year before."

It's -2°C and we are walking down the track at 7am, I am admiring the unbelievable view you get from the top of the hill looking over the lakes and the mountains as the early morning cloud is lifting and the hot water spas are steaming. My mind is thinking back to the conversation that I had with Alden, the DH course manager, the day before and relieved that I took his advice on the weather as we pull another frost covered tarp off one of the bridges.

This will be my first of either two or three walks I'll do of the track that day. The course had to be checked before training could begin, and the work that was completed from the battering it got in training the previous day, was to be checked.

I'm starting to get into the role of UCI Technical Delegate, it's the same as anything else, you need to find your feet and also try and gain the trust of the riders and the

organisers to make it work. The courses have to be fun and flowing but also safe and according to the rules. I retired from international competition in 2003 and this was my way of giving back to the sport that had sent me on a rollercoaster ride for 12 years of my life.

I have never seen a Worlds from behind the scenes before, which is quite amazing since this was my 15th worlds of some cycling variety. It is like an ants nest, people everywhere all with their own jobs to do, all rushing off to strike the next thing off the list, but keeping a completely composed exterior so no one knows if there is panic or stress. After all, they are striving for that 'perfect worlds' they are proud of their country and culture and they have been given the mechanism to show this off, and you can see that with the opening ceremony they had sorted, with the Maoris and the start hut and finish of the DH.

I arrived in New Zealand with the rest of the British DH and 4X team two weeks before the event was to happen, I have two hats to wear at this race, the one of the GB DH/4X Team Manager (until Rob Jarman arrived to relieve me of my services) and then the task of being UCI Technical Delegate for the 'gravity' disciplines.

I had been out to Rotorua in March with the UCI to check that things were on course and to get a feel for what the organisers were trying to achieve, the first thing

that struck me was the jovial way they worked together and it was obvious the amount of work that still had to be done at that point and the relatively small amount of time they had to complete it.

The GB team side of things was relatively easier, this is the third year that BC have supported the DH/4X team at the Worlds and the riders and staff alike were starting to get used to the processes. Training was planned and meetings were held so that everyone could continue their preparation for the biggest one day race of the year. Looking at the team we took out there, I was really optimistic of what we could achieve. I am, like every other person in that team, very patriotic and with the possibility of listening to the national anthem in three of the four categories in the DH was a good thought.

The Worlds seem to produce such highs and lows in emotions with riders either surpassing their expected goals or falling way short. And this doesn't just effect the rider in question, it has a big impact on the staff and all involved, as they spend all their time rallying around making sure there are no problems or issues that the riders have to deal with.

We have meetings each night that cover the days events and we then deliver all the information that we have collected from training, which is of both the GB riders as

well as the other top riders from around the globe, so that they can put together the best run possible to try and win the stripy jersey that has eluded our senior riders for so long.

So for 10 days in a country on the other side of the world, the Brits are doing their stuff like they do for seven months of the year. We then pack our bags, dismantle the bikes and try and cram it all back into the box van that we have hired to make the 30 hour trip back to our mother country.

Maybe the results were a sign of what's in store for us in Fort William. Maybe we can shake the dreaded curse that has stopped some of the best riders in the World from winning that jersey. Maybe we will hear that sweet national anthem in our own country and everyone can then sing along to it. We shall see...

The Aussie youths, a bunch of jobs that made the podium plenty of fun. And they gave the riders the support they deserved, possibly thanks to Jack and coke!



HERRON

## RACHEL ATHERTON

RACHEL ATHERTON RIDES FOR THE ANIMAL GIANT RACE TEAM AND WAS THE JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPION IN 2005. THIS YEAR SHE MOVED UP INTO THE SENIOR CATEGORY JOINING FELLOW RIDERS TRACY MOSELEY AND HELEN GASKELL ON THE GREAT BRITAIN WOMEN'S DOWNHILL TEAM. SHE HAS HAD A GREAT 2006 SEASON, THE HIGHLIGHT BEING HER WIN AT THE BRAZILIAN ROUND OF THE WORLD CUP.

**SHE FINISHED THIRD, COLLECTING A BRONZE MEDAL, IN A TIME OF 3:57.80.**

After walking the track my general feeling was that it had some really good sections but they were all joined up by some horrendous flat bits. Once I'd ridden it however, it really flowed well and was great fun to ride. It didn't suit just one type of rider because there was a bit of everything, which made it hard, but more even. Practise was dry pretty much the whole time, so I was getting all the lines right in the woods. I was feeling pretty strong and eventually I nailed all the 'hucks' that were bothering me.

I realised after the first day of practise that actually we didn't have a lot of time left, so the rest of practise I spent doing the big obvious lines, and if I'm honest it was the worst practise I've ever done. The bottom was strange, there wasn't really anything there, apart from a few obvious bits, and so I rode it every time without thinking about lines or what I should be doing, just getting on to the next part of the course, and in my race run I lost a lot of time because of it. Seeding came and the support of the GB team really showed through. It is better now than ever before and it feels really great to be a part of such a strong team. I was feeling pretty nervous, I think everybody felt that we hadn't had enough practise and were not up to race speed, but it didn't matter all that much, as there was more practise before race day.

I donned my skin suit, I won't talk about the whys and wherefores, as there is so much to say. I hadn't done a practise in it and it was a mistake. I set off from the start, a few corners in and I hit a big compression much faster than in practise because of said suit, I launched so far and flipped over the bars in front of everyone. As I was crashing I thought I was going to be hurt and so did everyone else by the silence, once I was up they cheered so loud, so I pinned it the rest of my run. I came in tenth. I wasn't too bothered as it meant I'd come down before the others and I'd feel more in control.

On the Friday we had a little practise, it was like a whole new track. It was so wet, muddy and slippery, you could barely ride parts of the track. After a cruising run I headed up for another. I stopped in the woods to look at a drop that I'd been doing in the dry and thought 'looks piss easy', so I turned around to push up to do it again. It was pretty steep going and as I lifted the front end over a hole, my right shoulder just dislocated. It hurt like hell and I dropped to my knees, wiggling my arm and it popped back in. I was in tears and agony.

In bed that night I had the worst déjà vu. It felt like last year, exactly the same, when I'd ripped my rotator cuff. Same day, same practise run, same hopes slipping away. Then my brother Dan came into my room and before I knew it I was back up on cloud nine, maybe eight. I didn't go to watch the 4X, that would teach me. As Dan told me what happened I couldn't believe his fourth place...actually I could. I was so happy that he'd shown everyone, and I felt so proud of him. I was gutted that Guido had taken him out when he'd been in second, but fourth is rad!

Race day. No nerves. Just pure fear. I was terrified that as soon as I put pressure on my arm it would pop back out. I rode a practise run hooked up on as many pain killers as I could find, I felt a bit out of it and had a big crash right onto my shoulder. It shook me up and it made me cry but my shoulder was fine! I've never ridden whilst in tears but it sort of makes you grit your teeth and blast through.

At the top of the course everyone was so tense and set on winning. As I launched from the gate I knew all I could do was my best. It took a while to relax into it and I knew that I was going slower than practise but what can you do, I was scared. I had a pretty solid top section but I pedalled pretty badly at the bottom. I made some mistakes and nearly had a big crash. I drifted sideways on this fast slightly uphill camber and hit a pole, I unclipped and the tape wrapped around my bars but luckily snapped before I stopped. I then thought 'there is no way I'm inside the top five'. I crossed the line in first! It really was the most physically tiring track I've ever raced. My whole body felt numb, apart from my shoulder which was on fire and I could feel the muscles going into spasm. I couldn't hear anything apart from my deep jagged breaths really loudly in my ears, I had tunnel vision and it felt like I could see myself too. It was a pretty mad experience.

I held onto number one until Sabrina came down, which meant I was on the podium, I couldn't quite believe it. Everybody had been looking so fast all week. I was so stoked to have been able to race I couldn't believe I had a podium finish.

I was so sure that the stripes would go to other names, but I'm happy for Sam and Sabrina. Wherever you would go that night, a random person would shout, "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie" and every Australian within range would yell "oi, oi, oi". There were some pretty good feelings around, and it rubbed off on everyone.



MURRAY

Sam Hill coming into the finish arena. The weather was dark, the track was flat, but still Sam's speed was to behold. In the last wooded section you could hear the crowd scream as if there was a big crash, but it was just their reaction and shock of seeing a rider hit the section so fast. The world champs is all about that one chance, Sam took it and may not let go for long time yet.

Sabrina Joiner had a no sit down policy during her run. With the fitness and strength to back it up she powered down where is counted, and kept it safe in the rough. Also it's not the worlds unless the French take home some metal.



PERKIN

"It was like being in a mosh pit for four hours," says Tony Moore, a mountain biker from Queenstown. "The crowd were six deep lining the whole track with noise makers. The lift you got every time a rider went past almost made you giddy."

Race run was different to any I have ever experienced. As camera flashes went off in my face, I was hit by a wall of noise that lasted the entire course. It was a thundering storm of cheering, foghorns, bells and whistles...I so wish I'd had more time to enjoy it. But for as long as it took to secure the bid to get the worlds, put the final pieces in place for the event and get the crowds up the hill, and for us to bomb down, it was all over in an instant.

Everyone arrived the week before practice, did some sightseeing, realized I wasn't joking when I said Rotorua would be cold and stinky, raced, packed up and left. Another worlds done and dusted.

And as I donned my gorgeous blue gown and funny little white ankle socks a week after the race for yet another surgery on my wrist, I couldn't help but think about all my mates that were a million miles away flying back to Europe to race the last World Cup. But as they say, it's a small world and when I found out that the anaesthetist and the charge nurse doing the operation were both mountain bikers I felt a bit better.

The worlds are always special, but having them in my home country was awesome and the crowd support is something I'll always remember.

**RESULTS**

**DOWNHILL**

**SENIOR MEN**

1. SAM HILL	3:11.03	
2. GREG MINNAAR	3:15.25	+4.22
3. NATHAN BENNIE	3:17.15	+6.12
4. STEVE PEAT	3:17.92	+6.89
5. CHRIS KOVARIK	3:18.04	+7.01

**SENIOR WOMEN**

1. SABRINA JOINER	3:50.32	
2. TRACY MOSELEY	3:53.83	+3.51
3. RACHEL ATHERTON	3:57.80	+7.48
4. MELISSA BULL	4:00.40	+10.08
5. EMMELINE RAGOT	4:01.03	+10.71

**JUNIOR MEN**

1. CAMERON COLE	3:28.28	
2. SAMUEL BLENKINSOP	3:29.45	+1.16
3. ANTOINE BADOUARD	3:29.84	+1.55
4. RALPH JONES	3:30.14	+1.85
5. JAMES MALTMAN	3:36.12	+7.83

**JUNIOR WOMEN**

1. TRACEY HANNAH	4:07.07	
2. FLORIANE PUGIN	4:11.74	+4.67
3. MICAYLA GATTO	4:40.91	+33.84

**MEN 4X**

1. MICHAL PROKOP	
2. ROGER RINDERKNECHT	
3. GUIDO SCHLUGG	
4. DAN ATHERTON	

**WOMEN 4X**

1. JULIE KIRNER	
2. ANNEKE BEERTEN	
3. ANITA MOLCIK	
4. JANA HORAKOVA	

## VANESSA QUIN

**VANESSA QUIN RIDES FOR THE DIRT TEAM AND WAS THE WORLD CHAMPION IN 2004. SHE HAD A DISASTROUS START TO THE 2006 WORLD CUP SEASON WHEN AT THE FIRST ROUND IN SPAIN SHE CRASHED AND SEVERELY BROKE HER WRIST. THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN HER HOME COUNTRY OF NEW ZEALAND WAS HER FIRST RACE BACK FROM INJURY. ONE WEEK LATER SHE WOULD BE BACK IN HOSPITAL UNDERGOING YET MORE SURGERY TO REPOSITION LIGAMENTS THAT SHE DAMAGED IN THAT CRASH FOUR MONTHS PREVIOUSLY.**

**SHE FINISHED SEVENTH IN A TIME OF 4:04.20.**

It's 6am and I'm jolted from my sleep by a bang on the door. Still in my nightclothes I open up to see the local courier guy grinning at me with a parcel to sign for.

"So, are you ready?" he says, his enthusiasm almost missing its mark on me.

"Pardon me?" I say in return, wondering if he's one of these mental 'get up early full of energy' guys.

"Ready for the worlds...I hear the track is looking good," he says.

Smiling, I get it now.

Later, once I've woken up and changed out of my PJ's, I head for the front door again only to be stopped in my tracks by the neighbour wanting to know what

time racing will start and where the best place will be to watch. I'm a little stunned. I knew that having the World Championships in your backyard was going to be a big deal to diehard mountain bike fans across the nation, but I had no idea how far reaching the ripple effect would carry.

This was what struck me the most about this years big race...the people. A 35,000 strong crowd came to watch on downhill race day. A lot of the same crowd lined the 4X track the evening prior and were seen cheering at the side of the cross country course the next day. And they weren't just cycling enthusiasts. They were mums and dads with their kids who would normally go to the rugby or watch sport on Sunday Grandstand. And standing beside them were all my friends and family, along with other team Kiwi supporters there to cheer us on.



PERKIN

MURRAY



MURRAY



And it should draw a crowd. Rotorua was at a standstill before, during, and after the 4X race. The MX sized track opened many people eyes to 4X racing, and what a good introduction.



## HELL TRACK WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 4X

**H**ave you ever seen anything like it? We know that there are problems with 4X in trying to make sure that there is good racing, but when tracks look as good as this who cares? The track in Rotorua was a masterpiece, the full-on MX dream. A great start, huge jumps, big berms, nice and wide and even had a wallride.

*"Ever seen the movie Rad? Remember Hell Track with the big vert start? Well...this track is pretty much vert. Right out of the gate, it drops straight down, it's like looking over a cliff. Then it goes into a fairly flat first straight, first turn is a big berm with a roller on the inside, then it goes into another big gully downhill to an uphill second turn that you can probably step-up into or go around the berm. The inside is higher than the outside, so it will be slower and more technical to go there, that is how all the turns are. Then the third straight. There is a triple-stepdown into another pit, the roll into it is really vert as well. Seems like the backsides were not really considered for racing here, they are all steep, and in some cases blind. The third straight is huge. Doubles downhill with side winds, plenty scary, but exciting at the same time. The scale of this track is crazy. Then there is a wall ride with inside hip options, but it looks too slow to do the hip and make the next bit OK. Who knows? We measured the bottom jumps, and they were about 28-30 feet."*

*-World Champion Jill Kintner after walking the course.*

The track intimidated many riders, there is no doubt of that, particularly after some very nasty crashes in practice. Our thoughts especially go out to young Australian rider Rene Junga, who had a very serious crash in one of the practice sessions. A wake up call to all of us as to how dangerous our sport can be. We wish her well.

Racing was elbow to elbow, bar to bar action. Take-outs were commonplace, hopes of victory dashed by the odd T bone in a corner. Just quite where you draw the line on contact in 4X is up for discussion, but when experienced riders like Brian Lopes and Dan Atherton get bumped out of the way rather unceremoniously then maybe we should ask some questions. The old line 'that's racing' sometimes can be a little hard to swallow when you have traveled half way round the world to be taken out by a kamikaze on a bike. But passing places are few and far between on most tracks so I guess you have to take any chance you can.

But two riders have dominated 4X this year, Michal Prokop and Jill Kintner have been almost untouchable, each having only dropped one round of the World Cup up to this point, Prokop in Willingen and Kintner in Mt St Anne. Both had already won their respective World Cup overall titles by this point in the season with one round still left to race, and their stranglehold on 'all things 4X' continued here. Both qualified in first place with the quickest times. Prokop did what he does best and took the race by the neck, the hugeness of the track not seeming to phase him or his hardtail one bit. The same with Kintner, leading from start to finish. Deserved winners. 🏆

- MEN**  
 1. MICHAL PROKOP  
 2. ROGER RINDERKNECHT  
 3. GUIDO TSCHUGG  
 4. DAN ATHERTON
- WOMEN**  
 1. JILL KINTNER  
 2. ANNEKE BEERTEN  
 3. ANITA MOLCIK  
 4. JANA HORAKOVA



The jumps looked big, but this one was easy to over jump at race pace, care had to be taken or a big flat lander was waiting.



MURRAY

Brian Lopes fell prey to the tricky second corner despite his normal standard of gate.



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BORGSCHEUTE

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Michal Prokop is pure class, maybe the best BMX/4X rider in the world at the moment? With a fourth at the BMX worlds this year, maybe he can take the MTB and BMX golds next year, then roll on '08 for the Olympic triple.



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One way to make your sponsor proud, ride your bike all over their logo. Jill Kintner can adapt to new things very quickly, her skill base is so strong the other ladies need to catch up, and quick.