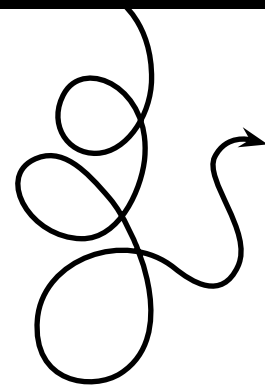




2010 SINGLE SPEED WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

WORDS: CRAIG TIRIANA



Kiwis can fly on one gear.

Kiwi Garth Weinberg is marked for life - and he wouldn't have it any other way.

The Rotorua 38-year-old rode his way to the World Singlespeed Mountainbike title on his home trails in Whakarewarewa Forest.

The effort saw him branded a world champion, the post race champion's ritual demanding a special tattoo to mark the world's fastest one geared off-road rider.

"Are you going to get the tattoo?" bellowed race organiser Dean Watson.

A brief pause. "Let me think - yes," offered the race-worn Weinberg, who already has two New Zealand title marks on his body.

This tattoo was going over his heart.

"This is probably going to be the last time I had a chance to win something like this so it's going to have my heart in it."

It was a case of third time lucky for the two-time and current New Zealand champion, who headed home defending world champion Ross Schnell in the sport's equivalent of a sprint finish.

That involved both riders emerging from 40km of single-track riding and devouring a can of cleansing Speight's Traverse ale in the final beer shortcut before rapidly pedaling over the finish line.

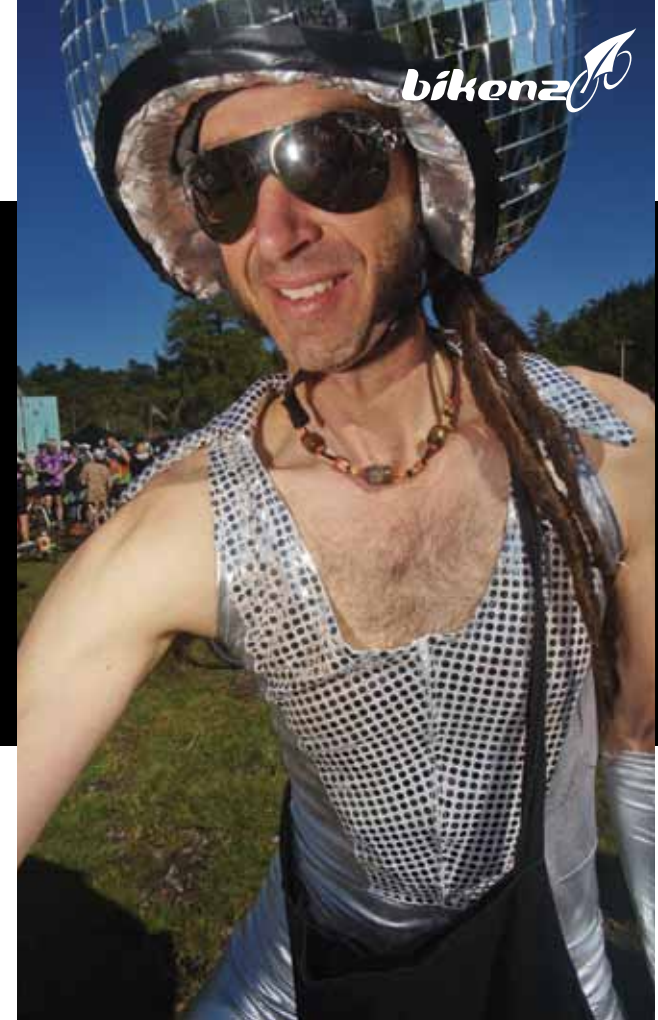
Weinberg chopped it down first and following a champion's skid, collapsed over the Kiwibikes finish line with proud wife Rachel and daughters Melissa and Hannah joining him on the ground.

There were tears, Dad trying to explain to his youngest just what had happened.

"Hannah didn't like me crying: I told her it was because I was happy," Weinberg said.

There was no secret recipe to his victory. The winner had simply ridden his "arse off" and in the process totally exceeded any pre-race expectations he held.

"I would have been stoked with a top five



depending on the start but it all came together. I got out about 25th or 30th and picked a few off early and held in there," said New Zealand's second world singlespeed champion.

The race start had a twist - after all, this is mountain bike racing, but not as everyone knows it.

In sort of a rough tribute to herding sheep, all the riders including Elvis, Superman, a Human Disco Ball, Animal from the muppets, Marilyn Munroe, five beer cans, numerous fairies, criminals and rugby's Captain Hurricane to name a few, started in an enclosed circle.

Slowly they moved around as race director Dean Watson, the DJ and Brooke "Wiggles" who started clothed like a startline pit girl and worked down to a fetching black knickers and bra uniform - combined to whip the riders into a pedaling frenzy.

Brooke's wiggles did the trick with one visitor; wearing only a leather thong, sunglasses and hat, breaking ranks and passionately doing wheelies as he chased a playful romp. The pre-race warm-up was well underway as the Labour Weekend sun added its warmth to a festive - and possibly slightly disturbing - scene.

Then the riders were off, a rolling party of colours and smiles, heading for the hills with Weinberg on the way to a dream win.

"It wasn't really a reality because I knew who was in the field," he said.

"Once I got ahead, I was waiting for them to come past but they didn't come."

Weinberg joins Aucklander Clinton Jackson, winner in Castlemaine, Australia back in 2003, as the only Kiwi winners of the world singlespeed title.

Schnell was the title favourite and the American with the mutton chops sideburns led the riders through the first 20km lap transition. Weinberg was on the 10-year professional's tail and took the lead during the second beer shortcut deep in the forest.

Weinberg hammered himself on the familiar terrain, moving the advantage out to 28 seconds at one point before the defending champ nipped it back to 10 seconds inside the last kilometre.

However, there was no stopping the home town hero as the hundreds of supporters clinging to trees screamed with each pedal stroke to the race finish.

It was incredibly fitting the local won the race, according to event media man Graeme Simpson.

"[Garth] inspired this, he really did," said Simpson, who was part of the Rotorua Singlespeed Society that pitched for and brought the championship to New Zealand.

"It was almost three years ago when Garth came back from Scotland [after a top 10] and now we have a world champion."

In an incredible third was US SuperBike superstar, Ben Bostrom.

The women's title also came Down Under with Australian adventure and mountainbike racer Heather Logie overcoming two beer stops to hold out local "pocket rocket" Nic Leary.

Logie had been in Rotorua for just over a



week and rode in last weekend's 100km race, then every day as she took advantage of some great single track riding.

"I've had a week of loving the trails here, we've got nothing like this back home. I've been out every day with a grin from ear to ear and I can't stop smiling, it's awesome," said the Canberra 31-year-old, who chucked on a last-minute costume best described as sassy-stripper-meets-police girl.

"I got lots of good comments, the crowd was awesome," said Logie, known to her friends as "Fun Police".

Leary, dressed as a rock chick, chased her hard but the Aussie's legs held on despite a shortcut-induced close shave with of Rotorua's

famous trees.

The finish line thought of a compulsory winner's tattoo wasn't that great for the Aussie.

"I feel kind of sick now," Logie admitted as she waited for her turn.

"I don't know where [to have it] ... I hadn't thought about it at all."

Leary's second spot equaled fellow Rotorua rider Anika Smail's runner-up effort of 2008.

More than 850 riders took to the trails and basically the winning time was 40km and at least two beers after the start for one and all.

*Race Results World Single Speed Mountainbike Championships Whakarewarewa Forest, Rotorua, NZ, October 23

Men: Garth Weinberg (1) NZ, Ross Schnell (2)

USA, Ben Bostrom USA (3) Mark Leishman (4) NZ, Dan San Martin (5) Aust.

Women: Heather Logie (1) Aust, Nic Leary (2)

NZ, Katie O'Neill (3) NZ, Anja McDonald (4) NZ, Janine Cavanagh (5) NZ.

All the rest did very well.

“There is logic to this madness.”

It was probably the quote of the day when the World Singlespeed Mountainbike Championships were decided for 2010.

Race director Dean Watson said it perched in a cherypicker while more than 850 one-g geared and free spirited cyclists circled him moments before the first ever New Zealand hosted race started.

It was an amazing scene with the riders about to take part in the biggest rolling fancy dress party of their lives.

It was somewhat spiritual. The riders were trancelike, the house-type music adding to their focus as Watson sent them away onto the world famous Rotorua mountainbike trails.

This has to be the only world championship in the world where Muppets and superheroes can line up with cycling stars.

At one end of the event were the racers, primed and ready to hurt themselves for the chance to be crowned world champion. But the majority, including New Zealand's road cyclist Julian Dean, were there for fun, fun, fun.

The Waihi-born professional roadie who lives in Rotorua when not in Europe had been a

late entry, talked into going off road by Dale Hollows: legendary spanner to several Kiwi cycling stars.

Dressed in a splendid orange tracksuit Dean looked a cross between an 80s sports star and movie character Dirk Diggler.

It was the perfect disguise to walk up the hills and partake in the odd beer shortcut.

"This is my track suit ... I thought it might be a goody but there are some pretty good costumes here," laughed Dean, admitting he'd re-claimed the threads from his parents in time for his second world championships of October.

"Obviously there are some people here that want to win but most of the people just want to have fun - it's good to be part of something that's so relaxed," said the New Zealand representative at the recent World Road Championships.

Like many of the 850 plus starters in Rotorua, Dean loved his first single speed experience with family and friends.

"Yes" he would do it again and what could he see as a great addition to the Tour de France: "That start would be good." ●



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