

Clinton Jackson

2003 Singlespeed World Champion

words by Bruce Wilson
photography by Graeme Murray



Singlespeed riders are supposed to be unconventional, maybe eccentric, definitely strange - freaks even. After all they've shunned the modern mountain bike with its 27 speeds, a gear for every situation (sometimes several gears for the same situation!). They give the one finger salute to that type of riding and revel in the knowledge that technology is not for them, that they are part of their own riding revolution whether others want to be or not - they don't care!

With that in mind I went off to meet Clinton Jackson, an Auckland singlespeeder for a coffee. Clinton just happens to have won the World Singlespeed Champs in Australia last year, so surely that would make him the most rebellious of this bunch of misfits. After all these World Champs are not your average race, normally held in the USA this year they ventured to Castlemaine, Australia. The emphasis is on having a good time, so there were a couple of big nights getting to know fellow entrants over a few drinks before race day.

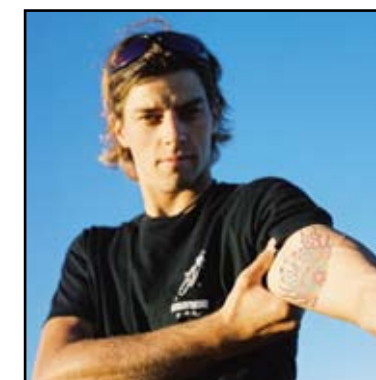
Race day saw participants turning up in all manner of costumes with their bikes (all singlespeed of course!), including a bike fitted with a car stereo - nothing like cruising with tunes. The 8km single track course included a detour that saved the riders five minutes - the detour was through a beer tent where it was compulsory to scull a can - Clinton did this a couple of times, "I couldn't do it every lap, it was Castlemaine XXXX, I can't scull four cans of 4X!" In the end the race came down to a sprint to the finish - against Australian professional XC racer Paul Rowney. Clinton pipped him to the post and claimed the glory.

The prize - a tattoo, that Clinton now wears proudly. He had no hesitation in getting it, although his Mum was a bit concerned "I told her over the phone I'd won. She'd seen the tattoo on the internet and thought it looked huge. But I said don't worry Mum, it's on my forehead!" In fact it sits on the inside of Clinton's bicep, the outside is reserved for some NZ-inspired ink.

So the question that always comes up with singlespeeders is "Why?" And Clinton responds as most others - the simplicity, "It's easy, you just get on and ride, you don't have gears to worry about and the chain is always tight - you don't even have to oil it!" But here the story takes a twist; Clinton doesn't label himself a singlespeeder. "I'm a cyclist; I like all kinds of riding. As a kid I rode BMX, now I have my singlespeed, a road bike and a geared fully. I just sold my cyclocross bike."

And as if to emphasize the point during the course of our conversation a group of lycra-clad roadies wander in for a post ride coffee and hassle him for not being on their morning ride. Clinton raced the first few rounds of the National XC Series on his geared full suspension bike until a mystery virus ruled him out of the rest. He also competes in the odd road race - "You can't do 70kph on a singlespeed". "The singlespeed is great for fitness and it's the bike I ride most, but if I'm going out on a four hour epic trail ride I'll take the geared bike - I'm not stupid." But then there are also the weekends where he'll join a bunch of fellow singlespeeders on his fully rigid for a weekend away riding. It's all about sharing the experience.

This is a pretty cool attitude and seems to be typical of Kiwi singlespeeders. They're not out to turn their backs completely on mainstream riding. It's more that they've discovered this pure form of riding that gives them new experiences in the world of mountain biking. They can own their geared techno wonder bike and ride that when they want to, plus they can own a singlespeed that breaks down their riding back to it's simplest form - concentrating on momentum, no gears needing to be changed or derailleur slapping and breaking concentration on the trail. It seems like they could just be on to something good.



> His bike was also converted by Jeff.