



SSWC2010

WORDS BY CARL PATTON

What to say about the Single Speed World Champs 2010? That's a tough one. It's not like the first rule of SSWC is not to talk about SSWC, in fact I'm pretty sure that's 'wear something ridiculous that makes pedaling very difficult'. No, it's just that some experiences are hard to express in words. If you weren't there, I could tell you it was a awesome event – I'll say the best mountain bike event I've been to, and everyone had a great time on their bikes and otherwise. I could say about 1000 'racers' rode two laps of a tough 20km course through the amazing trails of the Whakarewarewa Forest, including a bit of pushing for most, and one less lap for some more interested in partying (lying in the grass) than others. But that doesn't cover it. So listed at right are a few of my highlights, and we couldn't let Garth go without his take on the event (that guy is a machine, or 'an Alien' as some of the locals say), otherwise, I reckon the best approach is to let the pictures do most of the talking...

SSWC2010 NOTEWORTHY NOTES

- ⊗ **Garth won!**
- ⊗ The start was nuts – 1000 bikers in a circular corral, moving slowly, until race director Dean Watson (with a bag over his head to avoid any chance of rigging the start) blew the start horn and one section of the corral opened up to let 1000 riders out. It was crazy, except through sheer luck I was positioned so I got out in about 15th, so had the start all the fast guys dreamed of (thanks Dean, the cheque is in the post).
- ⊗ Some costumed freaks still ride real fast. Tim Wilding in full face 'T-Rex' dinosaur head gear flying past me comes to mind, and Cabin in Iggy Pop get up charging up from a start somewhere in the 500s to 4th was very impressive.
- ⊗ Discretion (pushing) is the better part of valour (walk before you cramp).
- ⊗ Some last minute singlespeeding led to a few race-day mechanicals, with several bikes sporting no chainrings, having fallen off somewhere on course.
- ⊗ Regular beer stops mean you need to carry less water – I wish I'd thought of that before lugging an extra 2kg around with me on my back.
- ⊗ It's awesome to have spectators running through the woods with megaphones shouting encouragement and good natured ribbing. Being dressed in a Marmite theme, I tended to get a bit of "I like Vegemite better" – which I find hard to believe. Besides, Vegemite was out there too – she got the opposite heckle, of course.
- ⊗ All the beer drinking and dressing up looks like an excuse not to pedal hard – turns out that's kinda true, but I'm not going to claim I wasn't trying hard, just because Chris Southwood, Editor of Australian Mountain Bike came past me on the second lap wearing a New Zealand skinsuit (which he must have borrowed from a very small lady). Besides, Garth won.

THOMAS LINDUP AND HIS FLYING SQUIRREL SUIT... SAYS THOMAS "I MADE IT A WHILE AGO IN MUM'S SEWING MACHINE AS A SUIT FOR PARTIES AND MUSIC EVENTS. RIDING IN ITS ORIGINAL INCARNATION WAS DIFFICULT AS IT HAD A SECTION OF FLUORESCENT YELLOW LYCRA STRETCHED BETWEEN THE LEGS. HOWEVER I ALWAYS WANTED TO DEVELOP IT'S BIKE CAPABILITY AND I THOUGHT SINGLE SPEED WORLDS WOULD BE THE IDEAL PLACE. SO I CUT OUT THE LYCRA BETWEEN THE LEGS AND DISCOVERED IT'S THE MOST AMAZING ITEM OF CLOTHING TO WEAR WHILE MOUNTAIN BIKING. ON THE BIKE IT BECOMES A JOY TO BE IN AND ONLY A FEW MINOR ISSUES ARISE WHEN 'RACING' IN IT...LIKE WIND RESISTANCE AND TAGGING ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU PASS. STILL, IT MADE A GREAT WIND BREAK FOR ALL THE RIDERS THAT FOLLOWED ME, THOUGH IT ALSO BLOCKED MOST OF THEIR VISION WITH A MULTITUDE OF COLOUR AND RIPPLING FABRIC, AS WELL AS RAISING FEARS THAT I MAY AT ANY MOMENT BE PULLED TO A HALT BY ANY OF THE PASSING TREES, BUSHES AND OTHER RIDERS AND BIKES...". JUST AWESOME.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK LAMBERT

SPECTATORS WEREN'T LINING THE BANK OUT OF THE RIVER JUST TO CHEER RIDERS ON...



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ZEPH WADSWORTH

THIS HAPPY HARD-MAN RODE THE FULL TWO LAPS IN A SNIPER SUIT. KUDOS.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK LAMBERT

DISCO-MAN RODE WITH HIS BIKE MOUNTED GHETTO BLASTER BLASTING, UNTIL HE SUFFERED THE SAME FATE AS THE RIDER ABOVE IN THE CREEK.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK LAMBERT



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK LAMBERT

NACHO LIBRE - THESE ARE HIS RECREATION CLOTHES



GARTH, SPORTING A FRESH TATTOO OVER HIS HEART, A FEW DAYS AFTER THE EVENT.

TALKING WITH THE ALIEN

To say that the locals (all Kiwis) were happy to see Garth Weinberg win the SSWC2010 in Rotorua on 23 October, is one hell of an understatement. Garth is a well known figure in the Rotorua mountain biking scene – he wins almost every singlespeed event he enters, is never seen on anything but a singlespeed, and has been called “the Alien” because he rides like he’s from another planet. Despite that, he wasn’t necessarily the favourite to win SSWC, because despite his legendary status, the competition had their own legacies in tow. Ross Schnell, was the reigning Single Speed World Champ, and is an all-round shredder, Jeremy Horgan Kobelski is a current World Cup racer at the top of his game, and then there were the local usual suspects, like Mark Cabin Leishman, and the dark horse, Ben Bostrom. But at the end of an extremely hard fought race, it was Garth who charged into the final beer tent and across the line first. I spoke to Garth after the event to get his take on the race:

How do you feel when you see your SSWC tattoo?

It’s a dream that has become reality.

What did you think of the course? (and what’s your favourite trail?)

Originally I thought the course was a tad easy. I had flashbacks to 2009 at our SS nationals when a handful of talented riders made me feel quite ordinary. I thought that

if I was to have any chance of doing well the course would have to be grueling and technical for my local knowledge to help.

But after riding a few laps in training I soon found that it would be hard enough at race pace and there was a good balance of single track and short open road sections where you can do some passing.

There are heaps of excellent trails out there that the organisers could have used, but

given the fact that they needed to find a balance of spreading 900+ people out and have a two hour winning time they did a fine job of showcasing our world class trails.

I have many favourite trails in the forest but on the day the Dipper would have been my pick. Sure, it’s an easy grade trail but riding it at full speed is another story. Once I had clear track I could ride it a full pace and make some time up.

What was going through your head during what sounds like a tough battle with Ross over the course of the race?

Early in the first lap I worked out that I was in the top 5. That was more than I expected so I was telling myself that if I could just hang in there and not lose places I would have a dream result.

Shortly after that, Rad Ross rode past the whole group on the wash and made us look foolish. Pretty much what I expected really. I didn’t think we’d see him again.

It wasn’t really a battle until I passed Ross in the 2nd beercut and my mind started working overtime. After that tunnel vision kicked in and I could only see the track directly in front of me. I didn’t recognize any people and was riding for my life.

It sounds like your beer drinking ability served you well – did that affect the outcome of the race?

Not the speed of drinking but rather whether the shortcut was taken or not.

I had already decided to take both the far shortcuts so when the front bunch I was with skipped the first one I got a jump on them.

Then when Rad Ross chose not to take it on the 2nd lap I found myself in the lead for the first time. I didn’t actually know I was in the lead for quite a while. It wasn’t until I had the lead motorbike right in front of me screaming out ‘go Garth go!’ and the spectators were even more out of their minds, that the game changed.

Of course coming out of the final creek crossing with a slim lead I knew I would have to do a very fast and efficient scull. I hadn’t dared look back so I thought I had a 15 or so second lead to do a comfortable beercut with. It’s only yesterday upon seeing video footage of the creek that I found out it was 6 seconds. Damn.

We’ve heard rumors that you were doing heaps of yelling and screaming on course – was that self motivation or just pain?

I can’t remember much of what came out of my mouth (apart from beer) but parts that stuck in my mind were the creek crossing on the first lap. I came down to the creek and expected to be able to take my favourite line running straight up the bank on the exit, but as usual it was blocked off with spectators. I was yelling for everyone to get out of my way. They never did.

The hooting on the first lap was because I was enjoying it and stoked to be in 2nd place. I expected Ross to just ride away.

I was pretty relaxed and content to be in 2nd.

Spectators at the entrance to the Dipper were saying he was just a ‘stone’s throw ahead’. I replied ‘then throw some stones!’

Then the whole scenario was turned upside down when I found myself in first position, it got pretty serious. Any noises produced after that would have been desperate self-motivation with a hint of pain.

You joined the Irish team to help them secure the 2011 SSWC, are you intending to defend your title?

It was a hoot and a privilege to be part of the Irish team. They made me feel very welcome and promised free accommodation, so I’m definitely planning on making a bloody good go at getting over there.

Aside from your win, what defined the SSWC2010 for you?

Probably the incredible support for me out there that I never knew I had. Everywhere I went on the course someone knew my name or at least that I was a Kiwi and was yelling and urging me on.

Can you ever top this?

Not really. The only thing that would come close would be successfully defending it next year in Ireland.

Finally I’d like to say some big thank yous that I never got to say at the prize giving:

Firstly Niner bikes and Bike Vegas. Wicked bike!

The organisers, N-duro events and Rotorua Singler Speed Society. They’ve always been my biggest fans and hosted an exceptional event that brought heaps of kudos to the city.

My wife and personal cheering squad “G-Hard”. They created quite an impression and made the finish an emotional experience that still chokes me up when I think about it.

Course marshals. We couldn’t have raced if they weren’t there. Some were personal friends and I didn’t even recognise them on the day because I was so focused, even when they were handing me a beer.

The other Kiwis that were racing hard. I think we had 6 in the top 10.

And all the other competitors who got into the spirit and were super considerate when the first riders were coming through.

Thanks Garth.