

Ladies Lead The Way

Celebrating 31 years in 2016, Upper Hutt's Bike Barn Karapoti Classic continued its renown as the Southern Hemisphere's longest running mountain bike race. And women's winner Kim Hurst continued her renown as the only local to win their own race with a record breaking ride that might well last the test of time.



Kim Hurst broke her own womens record

Established in 1986, the Bike Barn Karapoti Classic is the longest running mountain bike race in the Southern Hemisphere. Based in Upper Hutt's rugged Akatarawa Ranges, the course is an old-school adventure ride featuring huge hills and river crossings amid remote and rugged forest trails.

Some 700 riders from 10 countries lined up for what organisers say might have been the best ever combination of course and weather conditions. The result was a slew of records led by Upper Hutt's own Kim Hurst.

Smarting from a rare defeat in 2015 when a fractured wrist interrupted her training, the former three-time winner led from the first few seconds of the iconic running start across the Akatarawa River.



Nelson's Ingrid Richter tried to stay close. The German-born rider has been the form mountain biker on the national series this summer, but Hurst simply rode away on the first of Karapoti's four huge hills and would eventually win by almost 10 minutes.

The Upper Hutt doctor didn't have the energy for a victory pump at the finish line, and the clock revealed why. At age 37, Hurst had clipped three minutes off her own 2014 race record with an incredible 2hrs 42min 12secs.

While pleased with the record, the Welsh-born rider had actually started the race wondering about a sub-2:40 and pushed her limits the entire way, even crashing on the final descent off Doper's Hill with just 10k to go.

Behind Hurst, second placed Ingrid Richter was towed to Karapoti's fifth fastest ever female ride with 2hrs 51min 29secs.

Behind Richter a tight battle for third place saw Rhonda Gardner and Ann Hunn claim third and fourth just ahead of former Swiss national rep Sandy Vincent, who is married to Nelson's three-time Karapoti winner Tim Vincent.

The men's race at the 31st Bike Barn Karapoti Classic was both the same but different. Wellington's Jack Compton took out New Zealand's most prestigious title in his first attempt. At age 19, that was impressive enough, but the way he did it even more so.



Jack Compton



Sharon Prutton broke two women's records

In a wide open race, Compton led a loose lead pack in the opening 10k through Karapoti Gorge and the Hukinga Forest, then stretched them out on the Warm Up and Deadwood climbs, before making a race winning break on the undulating ridge tops leading to the Rocket Garden.

“Eden Cruise told me the place to really make a difference was on the ridge tops before the Rock Garden,” said Compton of advice from 2016 winner and training partner Eden Cruise.

“I really pushed it along there, probably too hard actually because it really caught up with me on the last climb up Doper’s Hill. That really hurt.”

Compton needn’t have worried. Finishing eight minutes clear of Woodville’s Gareth Cannon and Canadian Cory Wallace, the Porirua rider clocked 2hrs 10min 25secs to become the second fastest ever at Karapoti. Only Commonwealth Games gold medallist Anton Cooper has

ridden faster with his 2014 race record of 2hrs 07min 57secs.

Ladies, however, well and truly stole the show in 2016. Kim Hurst’s record took centre stage, but the ride of the day was arguably Wellington’s Sasha Smith, a former third place getter who took to the single speed this time around, smashing the record by more than an hour with 3hrs 18min 38secs to claim eighth overall among women.

But she wasn’t the only one. Fellow Wellingtonians Rhonda Gardner and Ann Hunn used local knowledge to set new marks in their age group. Third placed Gardner also set a new 40-49 year age group record of 3hrs 13min 11min, and right behind her in fourth place came former New Zealand rep Anne Hunn (nee Mahoney) who ripped out a 3:14.36 50-59 age group record.

On a day of records two Karapoti life members - 1988 winner Simon Kennett and three-time runner-up Wayne Hiscock - knocked nine minutes off the coveted tandem record with a

staggering 2hrs 47min. And the corporate team record took a tumble too, thanks to Powerco’s Wellington and Palmerston North branches.

Some record breakers were ground breaking. People like Wellington’s 71-year-old Peter Schmitz, who finished his 27th consecutive Karapoti Classic. And others such as Palmerston North’s Noel Pollard and Christchurch’s Sharon Prutton, who broke two records each.

Pollard, who in decades previous had set records for 50s and 60s, smashed his own record for the 70-plus men by 11 minutes with 3hrs 53min 22secs and at age 74 became the oldest ever finisher.

Prutton, who has also won age group world titles on the road, also broke the women’s 60 to 69 age group record by 11 minutes with 3hrs 34min 10secs and at 64 became the eldest ever female finisher, not to mention finishing 10th overall among women.

Sasha Smith all smiles on the way to a single speed record

