

Upper Hutt's First Winner

In 2013 Upper Hutt doctor, Kim Hurst, became the first local to win their own race. She shares that ride with us.

Well, that is the end of one of the most surreal Mondays of my life. It seems that all the mental imagery I conjured up during every hard training session over the last year played out for real this weekend. Either that or I'm still dreaming. Whichever it is, it feels pretty awesome.

Karapoti is a special race. In fact, it's more than just a race. It's an iconic piece of kiwi mountain biking history, a stripped back brutal no holds barred course left pretty much au naturale, and a huge challenge whatever part of the elite to weekend warrior spectrum you sit on. It also holds a place dear to my heart, being my home town race. For all those reasons, I totally love it.

Everyone has their own goals going in to Karapoti. Surviving, completing, joining the "Sub-3 Club", setting a new PB... and actually, that's kinda the order that things worked out for me. Because I actually have four Karapoti finishes to my name.

My lesser known first 'Poti was a bit of a disaster. It was in 2010, just a few months after moving to New Zealand. Despite a great start, I punctured on the Rock Garden then underestimated the distance to the bottom of Devil's Staircase and elected to ride on the rim then fix it at the top of the infamous hike-a-bike section. At the time it seemed like a very logical place to sit down for a little rest and fix a puncture.

Unfortunately, I suffered several punctures, possibly due to minor (cough, cough) damage from riding on the rim, and sat at the side of the track trying to glue multiple patches to a tube. After yet another deflating moment, I gave up on my trailside repair efforts and embarked on a run from Doper's back down the gorge to finish in 4 hours 25 minutes. It was a nightmare. I almost wanted to do it all again the next day just so I could see what I could do with better luck. Almost.

Instead, I took the more sensible option (unusual decision for me) and waited until the 2011 edition. For the first time, women had a mass start with elite and expert age graders setting off together. I surprised most of the elite field, as well as myself, with a new M1 women's course record of 3 hours 10 minutes and a second place finish overall behind multisport ace, Elina Ussher.

Four months before 'Poti 2012, I'd made the plunge back into structured training under the watchful guidance of Cowbell Coach, Lisa Morgan. Spurred on by the coach's suggestion (she was actually quite adamant) that a sub-3 hour time was possible, I cracked out a 2:59:59 and a second place finish behind Karapoti sub-3 regular, Fiona MacDermid.

I still remember taking my first look at the Karapoti Hall of Fame. It's an impressive who's-who of mountain biking history and something I already felt totally humbled to have become part of. The women's sub-3 club is even more exclusive and 2012 was a special effort to get myself into that club. I had never felt so emotional at the end of a race; 20-something minutes on the rivet from the top of Dopers never quite sure if I'd make it, but never backing off just in case I could. One second was all that was in it in the end!

After two consecutive runner-up positions, I was pretty sure I could take the next step up on the "right year" (which for Karapoti means the right mix of conditions and luck alongside the hard work beforehand) but I wasn't sure when it would be.

I have to say, the addition of Karen Hanlen's name on the start list had me wondering if this may not quite be the "right year" for me! She is a formidable athlete with incredible strength and an ability to ride herself into a race like no one else I have ever seen. But having Karen there inspired me because I was in PB form going into the race at the very least.

Karapoti 2013 was certainly not a flawlessly executed ride. I snapped my bottle cage while shouldering the bike on an early section of congested climbing and a long dry summer left the descents super loose ending in some blood-letting on Rock Garden and a high speed spill on Pram Track where I somehow choreographed a crash-roll-grab bike-remount sequence without ever fully grinding to a halt. The key, apparently, is to maintain momentum at all times (LOL).

Despite minor setbacks, I smashed out 2 hours 50 minutes and became the fourth fastest female in Karapoti history, but more importantly the first ever Upper Hutt resident to win.

I'm sure there'll be many more Karapoti's (or Karapotii?) in my future. I have a feeling it will probably become a lifelong obsession. After all, for some of us, anything after the first Saturday in March is just a countdown to the next Karapoti.

Kim Hurst returned in 2014 for a second win and new women's race record of 2hrs 45min 29secs.

Photo: Kat Sullivan

