

Race Reports from Whangamata and Port of Tauranga.

Early January each year sees two of New Zealand's sunniest triathlons, the Contact race at Whangamata and just down the coast, the Port of Tauranga Half Ironman at Mount Maunganui. However, summer deserted us in 2012, with both races taking place in cloudy, wet and breezy conditions. Despite this there was some great racing and a clutch of excellent performances by Wellingtonians across the age ranges.

At Whangamata on 3 January, the surf was so strong that most people except for committed surf lifesavers found the swim extremely tough going. Bobbing in and out of the waves were Aaron and Susannah Lynch, 3rd and 4th respectively in their age groups in the sprint race. And in the Olympic distance race, Kevin Nicholson and Jane Loughnan both secured podium places, with Mike Lynch placing 5th in his age group. Well done to everyone who finished the race!

Just 4 days later, New Zealand's fastest and most popular Half Ironman took place at Mount Maunganui. The flat 90km bike leg guarantees quick times but the race is not easy, with the 3.4km undulating off-road section of the Mount being tackled twice during the run and providing a nasty sting in the tail at the end of the race. This year the weather conditions were relatively benign for competitors (although fairly unpleasant for spectators) with only some breezy headwinds on the outward section of the bike course and the wet and slippery roads making life difficult. Even the nasty tidal currents prevalent in the swim were not really a factor this time.

This race, which also doubles as the national long distance championship, is always chock-full of Aucklanders who view it as their race, but as ever there was plenty of stirring stuff from those who had travelled up from the capital. Leading the charge were Deano Gaskin (M 35-39, 4 hrs 10), Sue Mellsoy (F 45-49, 4 hrs 38 mins) and David Craig (M 45-49, 4 hrs 24 mins) all securing brilliant wins in their age categories. Deano and David had just completed a massive training block including a 200km-plus bike ride from Taupo to National Park and back on the Wednesday before the race; maybe that's a taper session we should learn from, given the run times that both posted (Deano's 1.19 was the fastest by all the age groupers, and he finished 8th overall)! Sue won her age group by an astonishing half an hour, and was 12th overall amongst all the women.

Close behind them were excellent medal-winning performances by Natalie Gaskin (3rd F 30-34, 4 hrs 41), Mark Burke (3rd M50-54, 4 hrs 36) and Ann Bondy (3rd F60-64, 6 hrs 23). Mark claimed before the race that he had done just one bike ride and one run since his 10 hour effort at Ironman West Australia at the start of December. I don't think we believe you mate!

Matt Harrop also performed well racing in the pro ranks despite some hiccups on the bike legs with drink bottles, his 1.20 run split bringing him home in 4hrs 14 for 11th overall. Ex-Wellingtonian Elaine Brent, now living in Australia, also excelled racing in the pro ranks to finish 5th female overall in 4 hrs 31 mins.

A number of other club members produced excellent performances to finish in the top 12 of their age groups (some of which had up to 100 or more competitors), and so be eligible for automatic qualification to represent New Zealand at the Long Course World Championships in Spain in July. The third of Wellington's triathlon power couples (along with the Mellsops and the Gaskins), Rob Stewart (4 hrs 28) and Tineke Berthelson (4 hrs 52) both finished 5th in the 25-29 age groups. Nathan Martin produced an excellent 4hrs 30 (1.26 run) for 11th in the tough 30-34 age group, whilst in the 35-39 age groups, Todd Maddock cracked out an excellent 1.28 run to smash his half ironman PB by nearly half an hour in 4hrs 38 for 12th, and Rosi Zeiske did a solid 5 hrs 16 for 10th in the females.

In the "wiser" age groups, Jane Heather-Sclater finished 11th in the 40-44 age group in 5 hrs 30, all the more impressive for being the first person to complete an event of this magnitude with glycogen-storage disease. Nicky Blackmore was just behind Jane in 12th. James Turner managed 4 hrs 42 mins for 9th amongst the 45-49s, and was not disqualified, didn't puncture, and didn't steal anyone's shoes! Kingi Smiler (5 hrs 42) and Richard Sweetman (6 hrs 18) finished 6th and 4th respectively in the 60-64 and 65-69 age groups.

Other excellent performances included the likes of Nathan Millner and Evan Agnew smashing their PBs to finish well under 5 hours. There were of course many other excellent performances, too many to mention here unfortunately. But spare a thought too for the unlucky ones who were unable to finish the race, especially Tania Gillard who after an excellent swim, took a nasty face-first crash in the first 2 km of the bike leg, while trying to negotiate the tricky pedestrian-crossing speed bumps in Mount Maunganui's town centre.

Finally, mention must go to the committed bands of supporters who stood out in the rain to cheer everyone on, including the Lynch, Turner, Neal and Mellsop families.