

New Zealand



World Champions

Count them Two - in half a day.
Deux Championnes du Monde!

The Event the 2004 UCI World Mountain Bike and Trials Championships.

The Location the pretty French alpine village of Les Gets 60 kilometres south of Geneva.

The Date September 11, 2004

> Vanessa Quin on top of the world.



> In 2003 Scarlett Hagen was 2nd. In 2004 she went one better to claim the top spot and title of World Champion.

On a warm sunny Saturday, Scarlett Hagen of Queenstown dominated the Junior Women's Downhill. She slid to a stop against the inflatable catch fence, dropped to the grass and gave the ground a bit of a pummeling before finding her Mum for a big hug. No other junior woman even came close.

JUNIOR WOMEN'S DOWNHILL:	
SCARLETT HAGEN (NZL)	3.09.24
RACHEL ATHERTON (GB)	3.20.07
AUDREY LE COURGILLE (FRA)	3.21.45

World Champion number one!

JUNIOR MEN'S DOWNHILL:	
ROMAIN SALADINI (FRA)	2.48.69
FLORENT PAYET (FRA)	2.49.58
KYLE STRAIT (USA)	2.51.15
18. ROB FARMER (NZL)	2.58.89

And it was nearly 20 riders into the Junior Men's field before they caught up with her time.

At lunchtime news filtered through from the media centre that Anne-Caroline Chausson of France, top qualifier in the Elite Women's field, had crashed in practice that morning. She's been world champion for a very long time and is arguably the most successful mountain bike racer ever. But with a smashed up shoulder, she wouldn't be competing.



> Words by Graeme Simpson
> Photography by Birke Ulrich and Frank Bodenmueller

"She's my idol"

Vanessa Quin from Tauranga moved up to top seed and last rider on course. With Mio Suemasa of Japan in the hot seat VOQ started her run. Vanessa went through the intermediate split over two seconds up on Mio. The big group of Kiwis in the crowd started hollering and the silver fern flags began to wave. I was in the press mosh pit, just over the bouncy castle fencing at the end of the course. Vanessa came racing

ELITE WOMEN'S DOWNHILL:

VANESSA QUIN (NZL)	3.08.04
MIO SUEMASA (JAP)	3.10.82
CELINE GROS (FRA)	3.12.02

straight towards us knowing she was champion. She was off the bike whooping and punching the air. First hug for her partner Nigel Page. Then Scarlett was there, shouldering her way through the media scrum surrounding Vanessa. ("She's my idol", said Scarlett about Vanessa at her press conference later in the day).

World Champion number two - reward for the years of hard work Vanessa has put into the sport and for all her friends, family and sponsors.

In the main stand there were more cheers and some tears from long time advocates of mountain biking in New Zealand, like John and Jenny Mote, Dave and Shreeve Donaldson and Arthur Klap. They were all in Les Gets to promote the 2006 World Champs in Rotorua. Arthur (Race Event Director for 2006) had even gone the distance to support the New Zealanders that morning when he had a silver fern shaved into his hair at the Braun caravan. Dave D (Chairperson of the 2006 organising committee) summed it up nicely: "It was a privilege to be here to see that".

American Peter Graves is the voice of international mountain biking. He got it right with his announcement over the PA after Vanessa's win. In what was already a great year for New Zealand cycling, this double would be a magic tonic for the team promoting 2006.

any mistake could drop a rider 20 places

> Two-time Junior World Champ, Aussie Sam Hill, was one of the favourites in the Elite Men's DH but ended up 3rd.



Kiwis were popular in Les Gets before Vanessa and Scarlett scooped the pool. Afterwards, being from Nouvelle-Zelande was the best thing since sliced baguette. Silver fern flags became instant collector's items. If there is a more potent, immediately recognised symbol of our country than the silver fern on black, then please let me know. (*Now Graeme, are you weighing in for a flag debate? Ed*)

By early afternoon Scarlett's bike was hanging up in the GT-Hyundai tent in the expo village. There were a few empty champagne bottles too. This was France, after all.

GT-Hyundai really looked after Scarlett through the week and it had paid off in the best possible way. Over at the big Mavic/Adidas display a regular stream of people checked out Vanessa's very cool, pale blue Dirt Magazine/Intense M3.

Once the dust settled from a truly memorable morning the fastest two women on the mountain, overall, were Vanessa and Scarlett. This was a very fast course: tight and twisty after the start on the scrubby, alpine scree above the tree line with a big jump into a huge berm followed by an off camber run to the forest, where it was just section after section with no relief. Next, some big air before dropping onto the end of the 4X course. The finish line came straight after a pair of jumps and had a steep, short run off that copped a fair bit of criticism from UCI officials.

John Kirkcaldie described the course as one that would reward the brave and the quick. But, he added, any mistake could drop a rider 20 places. The competition was just that tight. The Kiwi riders in the Men's Downhill seemed pumped up by Vanessa and Scarlett's success. On the day only Craig Pattle from Rotorua improved his place to 24th and top New Zealander. Justin Leov (26th), JK (31st), and Tom Holland (33rd) all dropped back from their qualifying spots. Tim MacKersey finished 62nd.



**UCI MOUNTAIN BIKE & TRIALS
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS**

**Event Dates:
22-27 August
2006**

2006rotoruaamt.com

> Justin Leov on the gas. Unfortunately he didn't improve on his 15th place qualifying run.



> Craig Pattle was best of the Kiwi DH men with a 24th and a time of 2min 49.26sec.



It was a fantastic downhill, though. Former Junior World Champ, Aussie Sam Hill, started second and sat on the hot seat for a long, long time, until 2003 World Champ, Greg Minnaar from South Africa rode a flyer, on the high tech and hugely expensive Honda. Then one of the local favourites, Fabien Barel, just nailed it in 2.40.78. He rides for the Kona/Les Gets team so this was home territory. For the next half an hour he was a relaxed man, chatting with friends, fans and media. Finally it came down to the top qualifiers. Barel started to edge forward on The Seat.

Top 10...5...3. No one displaced him. Last up, fastest seed and 2004 World Cup Champ, Great Britain's Steve Peat. Peaty and the Orange team had been a major, friendly presence in the expo village all week and there were a heap of Brits in the huge crowd. At the split he had it in the bag.

Then, with just a section and a half to go...disaster. A big off. A huge cloud of dust. A sharp intake of breath from most of the thousands on the hill. Groans from the Brits. Peat picked it up to finish, but too slow, too late.

Hometown boy Fabien Barel was World Champ. Even before Steve crossed the finish line the crowd went nuts. Peat rolled to halt, stunned. Barel interrupted his celebration and raced over to shake hands and offer a word or two of commiseration. A nice moment...

At the medal ceremony 30 minutes later, there was time to reflect.

Four titles on offer - two French champs. Two New Zealand champs, two rainbow jerseys and winner's medals, God Defend NZ ringing out and the flag flying twice.

ELITE MEN'S DOWNHILL:

FABIAN BAREL (FRA)	2.40.78
GREG MINNAAR (RSA)	2.41.36
SAM HILL (AUS)	2.42.20



VANESSA QUIN
 WORLD CHAMPION
 YOU ROCK...THE WORLD!!
 BIG UPS FROM THE CREW AT SMITH NZ



the Theory
 HI-TALUTIN' STYLE FROM SMITH

"it was that kind of a night"

I fired off texts to NZ after Scarlett had won, then more after Vanessa had made it two. By now, it was well after midnight back home. But the replies still kept coming in. That evening we were back for the 4X under lights. The French police estimate of the crowd on downhill/4X day was 45,000. But it sure looked like more by 7.30pm.

WOMEN'S 4-CROSS

JANA HOROKOVA (CZE)
JILL KINTER (USA)
TARA LLANES (USA)

The 4X course had come in for some criticism – too tight, with the same steep, short runoff it shared with the downhill, and

you couldn't see the top of the course from the finish line. Even so, the event in Les Gets just exploded with spectacular racing, a few big crashes and great fireworks at the end of each semi and final. French showman, Cedric Gracia realised he was out of the running in one heat and unsuccessfully tried to pull a backflip. It was that kind of a night.

MEN'S 4-CROSS

ERIC CARTER (USA)
MICKAEL DELDYCKE (FRA)
MICHAL PROKOP (CZE)

Overnight rain on Friday cut the dust on the downhill course but cleared by the morning. Apart from that it had been beautifully fine and warm the whole week.

Until Sunday. The rain started just after midnight and Sunday morning was grey, wet and cool. On Thursday I talked to XC legend Thomas Frischknecht from Switzerland. He told me the cross-country course was a 'challenging' one - with big climbs mainly on grass - especially if it rained. He was right. The weather turned the XC course into a very hard slog for the Elite Men and Women. Apart from the climbs, the course had several tricky technical sections. By Sunday afternoon these were sketchy and very difficult. Most of the top riders played it safe and ran them. Even flatter sections that would have provided rest in the dry were slushy.

At the start Frischknecht powered to a comfortable lead. Crowd favourite and Olympic champion, Julien Absalon wearing a special gold helmet, had a very public moment on lap one. He slid to a sideways halt on a nasty off-camber corner on the grass above the start/finish and right in front of the big crowd.

But on lap 3, Frishy had a flat and the French riders took control. Absalon took off on the last lap, his team-mate, Cedric Ravanel, was second. Frischknecht was 4th into the finish area. He rode brilliantly through the chute, right on the edge of control on the slippery off-camber grass to snatch 3rd from Roel Paulissen of Belgium, at the last corner.

Magnifique. Frischknecht was off the bike before he'd stopped and did a great face-first mud slide.

Kiwi Kashi Leuchs rode impressively for seventh place. At one stage he got up to 5th and was always in touch with the leaders until the last lap.



> John Kirkcaldie was NZ's sole representative in the 4X.



> Cedric's fans are almost as special as the man himself.



ELITE WOMEN'S XC:

GUNN-RITA DAHLE (NOR)
MAJA WLOSZCOWSKA (POL)
ALISON SYDOR (CAN)

37. **ROBYN WONG (NZL)**
38. **JENNIFER SMITH (NZL)**
58. **SONIA FOOTE (NZL)**

In a remarkable double double, Norwegian, Gunn-Rita Dahle, also followed up her Athens gold by winning the Elite Women's XC World Championship in the morning. The Norwegians in the crowd with Viking helmets on and national flags painted on their faces went crazy. Their chant – "Gunn-Rita Dahle, Norwegian champion, European champion, Olympic champion, WORLD Champion" – said it all about this amazing woman.

Apart from Kashi's excellent race, the championships were disappointing for the other senior New Zealand cross-country riders. It showed just how hard it is for a team of part-timers to compete with well-funded, full-time professional Europeans.

In the Junior Women's on Thursday, Carissa Wilkes, of Rotorua, finished a fine 21st. Just how good this was became clear when we found out how crook she was. But she never gave up.

It was another great Kiwi story in the Junior Men's on Friday. Nino Schurter from Switzerland cleared out from a classy field, with another Rotorua rider, Clinton Avery in the chasing bunch. Clinton had moved up to 13th in the second lap from a start position of 23rd. By the second to last lap he was in 7th and looking good for a top ten finish. He appeared strong and totally focussed as he headed up the first climb of that last lap.

JUNIOR MEN'S XC:

NINO SCHURTER (SUI)
STEPHANE TEMPIER (FRA)
MAXIME MAROTTE (FRA)

U23 MEN'S XC:

MANUEL FUMIC (GER)
LIAM KILLEEN (GBR)
FLORIAN VOGEL (SUI)

75. **NICK HOTCHIN (NZL)**

What happened next was a mix of tragic and heroic. On a rocky, technical section he clipped a rock damaging his front wheel. Spokes went ping. But instead of DNFing (like a lot of riders in the various XC races) Clinton ran and pushed his bike the three or so kilometres to the finish line. 63rd may not sound that great. But it was a brilliant result for a 16 year old with just a couple of international races under his belt.

By late Sunday afternoon the rain had cleared and the sun was out. Les Get 2004 was a fantastic week – exciting racing, brilliant results (with New Zealand 4th on the medal table), 47 nations and a thousand riders competing, a who's who from the international bike industry in the expo village, a big turn out from the international media, 100 thousand plus spectators over the five days and TV coverage broadcast all round Europe and to North America, Japan and Australia.

Next year Livigno in Italy will host the Championships. It's another alpine town. Then in 2006 it'll be Rotorua's turn on Mount Ngongotaha with views from the Ngati Whakaue and Skyline estates (venues for the XC, DH and main event village) of the lakes, extinct volcanoes, the thermal wonderland of Whakarewarewa Village and White Island gently erupting out in the Pacific, and a classic, natural amphitheatre at Mountain Action for the 4X...

And a citizen's race the weekend before through all the great trails of the Whakarewarewa Forest. The Euros won't know what's hit them.

ELITE MEN'S XC:

JULIEN ABSALON (FRA)
CEDRIC RAVANEL (FRA)
THOMAS FRISCHKNECHT (SUI)

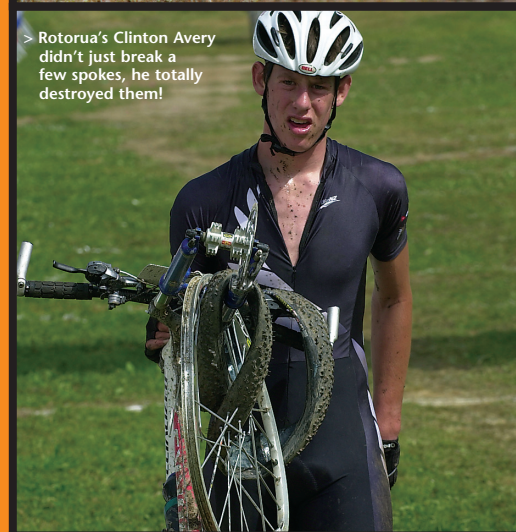
7. **KASHI LEUCHS (NZ)**
47. **MIKE NORTHCOTT (NZL)**
56. **TIM VINCENT (NZL)**
73. **STU HOULTHAM (NZL)**

JUNIOR WOMEN'S XC

NATHALIE SCHNEITTER (SUI)
LAURA METZLER (FRA)
TEREZA HURIKOVA (CZE)



> Kashi Leuchs rebounded from his disappointing Olympics to score a solid 7th in Les Gets.



> Rotorua's Clinton Avery didn't just break a few spokes, he totally destroyed them!



THANKS TO AIR NEW ZEALAND FOR HELPING GET THE CREW FROM THE ROTORUA 2006 UCI WORLD MOUNTAIN BIKE AND TRIALS CHAMPIONSHIPS ORGANISING COMMITTEE TO FRANCE AND BACK. AND TO CANON NZ FOR HELPING WITH CAMERA EQUIPMENT.