

Summer Series Event Three – Mainfreight Rice Mountain Classic Report

Entries exceeded all expectations, with 140 riders lining up for Event Three of the Pak'nSave Summer Road Series. The race honours the contribution made to the club by Alan Rice over many decades, and is without question one of the regions toughest events. First held in 1996, it travels over some extremely demanding terrain. This edition would see riders in the Medio Fondo tackle 1200m of climbing over a 59km course and those in the Grand Fondo 1800m over a 90km course.

Previous notable winners have included Rob Stannard, Jeremy Vennell, Jeremy Yates, Scott Lyttle, Antosh Kowalewski, Hayden Roulston, Wayne Hiscock and Brent Backhouse and for the women's trophy Serena Sheriden, Tracey Best, Catherine Dunn, Susie Wood (4 time winner) and Nadene Boyle.

55 riders in the **Medio Fondo** rolled out from Gladstone school in cool overcast conditions. The bunch was kept honest by a number of unsuccessful early attacks as they rode solidly towards the base of Limeworks Hill. The intensity went up a few notches and as the bunch swept round onto the climb a solid tempo was dished out. The peloton fractured with a lead group of 20 riders cresting the climb. The rolling course coupled with high pace saw the peloton whittled down to 12 by the time it reached the base of the steep 2km Te Kouraru climb with Joshua Turnbull being the only U19 rider to hang on in.

David Finley, Duncan Appleton and Richard Van Lent decided to “give it a nudge” and with no else able to follow, they were able to successfully break away and crested the climb as a trio. Once over the top they “were bombs away to the bottom” and worked well together until the bottom of Admirals Hill maintaining the gap from the chasing bunch. Only the 8km Admirals Hill climb with its infamous 16% ‘wall’ remained between the trio and a memorable victory. Half way up Finley fell off the pace as illness got the better of him. This left Appleton and Van Lent to fight it out for the spoils. They were even until the last kilometre when Van Lent lifted the pace and Appleton wasn’t able to follow. Van Lent took the well-earned win, followed in by Appleton and Finley.

The first woman, Jess Mazengarb came in a few minutes later, spent but very happy with a sterling ride. The remainder of the Medio competitors came across the line in drips and drabs, all looking exhausted but satisfied with a great day on this fantastic, iconic course.

Not content with his 100k solo effort in the Martinborough-Ngawi Classic, Antony Nalder (GP Meo) went one better and took the win in the **Grand Fondo** event, breaking away with Mike Naylor (Wheelworks) 30km into the race.

After a fast start and a few flurries of attacks over the first 10km, the 85 Grand Fondo riders faced their first real test of the day up and over Limeworks hill. A hard pace was maintained up Limeworks that saw the bunch fracture with a much reduced peloton cresting the climb. A further climb along the Masterton Stronvar Road saw the peloton reduced even further to 30 riders. It was soon after here where Nalder and Naylor made their move. There didn't seem to be much impetus in the bunch to chase the breakaway duo. A second following bunch was formed from the remnants of those who were dropped on the climbs and they set about chasing the lead group.

The pace through the numerous pinch climbs on the out and back Te Wharau leg took its toll with a number of riders unable to maintain contact with the front group. A much reduced group hit the bottom of the steep 2km Te Kouraru climb. This climb saw the group splinter even further with only six rolling over the top together. Three were able to chase back on the descent.

Only the soul destroying 8km Admirals Hill remained. Just before the Admirals turnoff Dave Rowlands made his move and took Boston Bright and Eden Cruise with him. No one else was able to respond. They took a 40 second lead into the climb proper. With Bright dropping back Boris Clark chased hard and was able to bridge the gap to Cruise and Rowlands. They soon had Naylor in their sights who had been distanced on the Te Kouraru climb by Nalder. The trio soon became a duo with Clark dropping off after an attack by Rowlands. While gaining on Nalder they simply run out of road. Nalder was able to take an epic solo win with a margin of 50 seconds, Cruise taking second place in a sprint finish by a mere second from Rowlands, who finished third.

Elizabeth Stannard lead the female riders home winning the women's trophy, followed by Natalie Howell (Bayleys Team Racing) and Rachel Cunningham (Onslow Tarbabies).

The female Onslow Tarbabies (OTB) were on fire taking a clean sweep in the Medio Fondo filling the top three female places and each winning their respective age division in the teams event. Chapeau to Jess Mazengarb (35-44), Gill Gray (45-54) and Stephanie Revell (60 plus). Not to be outdone Rachael Cunningham (35-44), Viv Collier (45-54) Larri Wallbridge (55-59 +) won their respective age divisions in the Grand Fondo. Special mention also to Rhonda Gardner (35-44) who finished 10 seconds behind Rachel. These fantastic efforts saw the OTB regain the lead in the Teams competition with 648 points. They are followed closely by Meo GP (521 points) Barleys Team Racing (418 points) and Rivet Racing (229 points).

Boston Bright, someone to look out for in the future, finished 6th overall and took out the U19 division for Bayleys Racing Team. He was followed by Thomas Stannard and Camden Feint (Bayleys Racing Team) who finished in the top 20. Eden Cruise was also noticeable, switching from his usual code of mountainbiking to be amongst the best on the day. He pulled out a great result, hot on the heels of his third placing at last months Mountain Bike National Championships.

Once again a big shout out to Wheelworks for providing a neutral feeding zone at the top of Te Kouraru hill. Massive kudos to all riders for undertaking this epic event. The cold drinks at the top were well earned. We hope to see you all the **Village Café Martinborough-Millars Circuit** on 24 March 2018. It's 50km for the Medio Fondo and 100km for the Grand Fondo. Registration is at The Village Café from 8.30 to 9.30am with event start around 10am