

FIVE PASSES

Good Luck Y'all !

It's taper time and the countdown is well and truly on for the 2023 Kathmandu Coast to Coast. The Five Passes 2022 alumni is very well represented and it's great to see so many of you on the start line for the Longest Day. It's pretty clear that a few of you are going to be crossing the finish line right at the sharp of end of the field.

Sam Manson has had a massive summer. Beating Dougal Allan by over seven minutes in the Motu Challenge was a solid marker for the summer ahead. Throw in the Tour of Southland, and second placing in the recent Waimakariri Kayak Classic, he's clearly set himself up well for a tilt at a maiden Longest Day title. Underlining his athletic prowess, Sam clocked in a 16th place in December's New Zealand 70.3 in Taupo. Not impressed ? This is a bloke who doesn't swim (apart from those rare occasions when he falls out of the kayak) and this was an extremely rare excursion into triathlon. Torrential rain dominated the day and the lake temperature was a shade under 15 degrees for the 1.9k swim. Sam swam in a beaten up old kayaking wetsuit with the arms hacked off- real Harry Hard Bastard stuff !

But with Ryan Kiesanowski also on the start line, it's game on. Like Manson, consistency is always a key part of his performance. Just getting to the start line is a massive victory for everyone, but for Ryan, with crops nearing harvest, Coast to Coast couldn't come at a worse time, but somehow, with great family support, he's always out there giving it his all. With Kiesanowski as a surname, and New Zealand's first ever Tour de France rider Harry Watson as a Great (Great?) Uncle, you know he'll always go well on the bike. But he's also a beast on the mountain run, and he finished just 32 seconds behind Manson in the Waimak Classic ! An epic battle lies ahead.

The Waimakariri has been running extremely low in recent weeks, and if that remains the scenario on race day, being out on the river a little longer will probably be to the liking of the leading contenders that have come out of Five Passes.

The women's race has been dominated by Simone Maier and Elina Ussher for a long time, but with four third placings in the Longest Day, Fiona Dowling has been beating on the door with increasing urgency. It's difficult to judge how Fi would have gone in the reconfigured 2022 race if it had been staged on the regular course. The shorter kayak stage didn't suit, but exiting the water at the same time as Elina Ussher indicates that her bike/run earlier in the day was in good shape. Is it her time ?

The biggest improver (in both the men's and women's) in recent years has been Tirau's Rebecca Kingsford. The former pro triathlete finished fourth in last year's Longest Day. Multisporters get a bit sniffy about the abilities of triathletes crossing over to the off-road stuff. More fool them ! If they're not taking notice yet, they should be. Rebecca was the first woman over the line in the Waimakariri Classic, beating home the highly accomplished veteran Kate Cambie, and also finishing nearly three minutes in front of the third placed Fi Dowling.

Sarah Jenkins is another who might quietly creep up the finishing order. Elina Ussher dominated last year's Motu Challenge Multisport race, but Jenkins snuck home in second place, just ahead of Dowling !

Other Longest Day competitors to have come via last year's Five Passes: Mike Draper, James McCone, Duncan Rutherford, Jeremy Mackenzie, Flavio Vianna, Hamish Chamberlain and Simone Faulker. Paul Gow has ridden Passes previously, and is also on the start line.

Olympic gold medal winning rower Nathan Cohen is lining up with a chap named Richie McCaw in the Two Day Tandem race. Setting aside McCaw's superman status on the rugby field, he's now a very experienced multisporter and adventure racer and the pair will be hard to beat. Cohen and McCaw last week both pictured with former Tour de France champion Geraint Thomas who was in the country doing a spot of training on the back of the Tour Down Under.

And good luck also to former Crusader and Scotland rugby international Matt Mustchin. When he isn't taking his clothes off at semi formal functions, Matt has been using the extra time following the cancellation of last year's two day race, to further build his kayaking skills and endurance. He's done a fine job. Finishing 13th overall, Matt was the first veteran home in the Waimakariri Classic.

So good luck one and all, the Five Passes Whanau will be cheering you all on !