

REPORT BY VIC POSSEE AT GLENLINN ON HIS RECENT TRIP DOWN UNDER IN SEARCH OF GOLD FOR CYCLING

I was invited to go back for this year's South Pacific Masters Games held at Hamilton North Island, New Zealand. These Games are held every two years for all people over 30 years old and for many different sports and games.

I had competed in 2002 and had great fun. I made many new friends in New Zealand, both in cycling and in other sports with limited success on the track racing. This time, I was offered free accommodation and a bike to ride in road racing events. This was back last year, before Christmas, so I raised the airfare by selling some bikes and equipment. Well the trip there, as we all know, is a long, long time sitting on your bot in an aircraft. I had planned to try and stay as healthy as possible, but I still got a heavy cold four days after arriving.

The first race – a week after arriving – was a time trial over 34kms. As I was not feeling very well, I decided to use the time as a training race for my main events later. I gave it 80% effort and finished in fifth position. Not bad and my host, who had watched the race, advised that the build-up of my race bike was slightly wrong.

The next day it was off to the local Track to fine-tune the set up for my next race on Thursday. This was my big chance to ride against the top rider in New Zealand who I couldn't beat at our clash two years ago. I was feeling a little better from my cold and on the day I said to myself 'all or nothing today, I am not coming 12,000 miles to be beaten!'

The first race was a 500 meters time trial and I was second to go to the line. Starting is very important in this race and when the start gun went, I could feel that I didn't have race legs and my lungs seemed very unwilling to expand for the 38+ seconds required for this type of race. In the end, the fastest two riders were Bruce Goldsworth and a silver medallist in the road time trial two days earlier. My first medal was a bronze. Well, I thought, better than fourth with nothing to show.

Riding my host's own bike, I raced in three more races – a 2000 meters scratch race and a 4000 meters scratch race. These are races when all riders compete together for the predetermined distance and then a race for the finish line. This was very hard for me as my lungs were still not letting me get enough air in to give it my best. I ended up finishing second to the same very good Kiwis, but I felt my condition improved as the day unfolded. Two silver medals to add to my bronze. Then the race which I never shine at – 'sprinting', but I rode the race for overall racing speed. Second again to the same rider. Well he was now on a very good high, so my last chance was the race which I now target – 2000 meters track pursuing for my age group.

I changed back to my own machine which I had taken with me and started preparing mentally for a last ditch effort to win one gold from this slightly dissatisfactory series of racing all in one day. I went to the starting line with a very positive attitude and with my mind set on getting at least one win against this rider who had now become quite a pal **off** the bike. Well my race started against a rider that had taken the silver medal from the first race – and ex-Dutch top road rider called Harry Donker. In this race the riders start at opposite sides of the track and try to catch the other rider.

Due to the track size, it was 5½ laps. In the first two laps I felt that all my training had been in vain and I would again get beaten. Then, as if by magic, I began to feel stronger and by the end of lap 4 I was 'flying'. At the end of lap 5 I was slightly ahead. Half a lap to go, I finished with maximum effort and I could just see the other rider. My thoughts were that at least I had won another silver medal. I rode round the track to slow up as these bikes have no brakes and expected to see my big rival getting ready on his bike for his race, but no, it was the next age group starting their races. Well I held my breath – maybe a Gold? I went over to my rival and asked why he wasn't racing. His remark quite shocked me. He said 'I knew you could beat me'. At least I got a moral victory and my first Gold medal for this year. Racing on the track for us was over and I started to feel more pleased with the day's efforts. We had a welcome cuppa and a chat while all the results were checked and re-checked. The Organiser was my pal from 2002 who had suffered a heart attack between those Championships and 2003. I was pleased for him that all the races went to plan and he told me when I got my gold medal that he was so pleased because he couldn't beat either of my main rivals in our age group.

Now to relax for the rest of the Championships. Next day a race that we don't do in Europe – a straight line sprint over 300 meters. The road is divided by cones with a starting ramp to ride off. The day started very wet and windy. Luckily the wind was right behind each rider off the start ramp. Not knowing the ins and outs of this type of race, I watched how other riders prepared and raced. We raced in heats and I finished in fourth place which meant that I would ride for the bronze medal again. The two fastest riders were the same as the previous day. Putting that battle out of my mind, how was I going to win this bronze medal? I hadn't seen my opponent race because I raced before him. We got on our bikes and I noticed he had old style gear change levers for ultra fast changing. Over in approximately 25 seconds, this is quick-fire racing. Off the start ramp like bats out of hell, he was ahead of me and I said to myself 'he is not doing this to me'. With my next gear change I was level and then with the next I was ahead and that's how it stayed. An unexpected medal!

And so the final day of racing – Friday. A road race on open roads over 60kms. We lined up only to find that two of our main medal chances did not sign the start sheet. The Dutch rider due to injury and the winner of the first day's time-trial for reasons unknown. The start gun fired and the pace was hot – like most races in that part of the world. I hung on for the first of four laps, Getting warm and into my stride, things felt better than they had done since I arrived. I put my head down and took off up the road only to look round and find my pal from the track who I couldn't beat plus a guy I hadn't seen all week. The chasing group were dropping back now as the three of us put more and more pressure on the pedals – each giving it maximum effort. Due to my cold and the difficulty I felt in getting enough air into my lungs, I could see the other two riders knew each other well and they started making it very difficult for me in the way we started the final lap. Each lap had a small hill like the one into Straiton from Crosshill just before the finish. Last time up this climb, I could feel this pair were stronger and I was hanging on like crazy. Over the top and I was 60 yards off the back. I chased with all my effort having trained for this trip for speed and not distance. I got back on terms, but they were working together against me. No Pommy was going to win this! In the sprint, I finished 3rd, so another bronze medal.

Here's to 2006 and my next trip to visit the Kiwis!

Vic Possee
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