



ALEXANDRA PRIMARY
SCHOOL READY FOR
THE MTB RACE



HAWEA FLAT SCHOOL
LINE UP FOR THEIR
TEAM ROAD RACE



RIDER NEGOTIATES
THE SKILLS COURSE

CENTRAL OTAGO

Top bike breeding ground for future stars

Words: Bill Godsall

Increasing bike skills, learning to ride as a team and the opportunity to compete, are the three key ingredients of the Central Otago Top Bike. Held this year for the 10th year, Top Bike is an initiative between Cycling Southland and Sport Central which has been the introduction to competitive cycling for a number of riders.

The event for Central Otago primary schools is a team event with six riders per team being made up of three boys and three girls. The final score combines four disciplines; a skills test (with points lost for putting your foot down), a team's MTB time trial through the sandy forest trails, a road team time trial (held on the local roads, followed by the individual grass track races held on Molyneaux Park.

The number of competitors is capped at around 200 riders with the event being fully subscribed almost every year. Joint organisers Bruce Ross (Cycling Southland) Bill Godsall (Sport Central) believe the event is crucial as part of the pathway for Central Otago athletes who wish to break into competitive cycling. Riders who have gone on from this event include past NZ Elite Road Champion James

Williamson, World Junior Track medalists Sophie Williamson, Liam Aitcheson, Central Otago's latest NZ Junior Road Champion Nicole Shields and World Cup Gold medalist Tom Scully, amongst many others who have represented NZ over the past 10 years.

The organisers are quick to point out the event isn't just about elite sport but an opportunity for students to try cycling as a competitive sport in a team situation. The winning teams get the opportunity to compete against Southland Schools in the regional finals with Central Otago often coming out on top. The bonus prize for the winning teams is the coaching session they are given at the Velodrome. This has been a major highlight over the years.

New Cycling Southland Development Officer,

Irishman Nick Longworth was so impressed with the talent on show he is putting together a programme to allow Central Otago school children to regularly travel to Invercargill to experience and learn how to ride on the Velodrome, so expect to see more Central Otago athletes following the pathway to glory. It should also be noted the strong support younger cyclists get from the local Central Otago Wakatipu Cycle Club, were the Juniors quickly progress through the ranks to A grade.

None of this could happen without the volunteers who are made up of parents, teachers, local cycle shop staff, Cycling Southland riders like Eddie Dawkins, Steph McKenzie and Cathy Jordan who have given their time to come along to be role models to the next generation...•