

## Sport

# Home for Team NZ

by Lucy Vickers

After five gruelling months of hard work, Team New Zealand are coming to the end of their summer testing programme for the 2007 Louis Vuitton challenger series in Valencia.

Team members are returning to Auckland to launch and test the new NZL 92, with everyone expected to be back by the end of the month.

The team have had a successful time winning the 2006 series of pre-regattas.

Richard Meacham, mid-bowman, says they have enjoyed themselves but are still committed to what they are doing.

"At this point in the campaign, there is little time for anything else.

"We are very fortunate to be doing this with a great group of people and we're having a lot of fun along the way. But the goal is always there, so they are long days."

Grinder Chris McAsey is also enthusiastic.

"I get to do what I love every day and it is always varied. It is really hard work and can take a fair bit of focus to keep the big picture in mind," he says.

The team normally spends six to seven hours a day on the

water. McAsey says their day is governed by the wind which does not start blowing until after lunch. "It slips into the Spanish lifestyle a little better with dinner not being served until 9.30."

A typical day begins early in the team gym, followed by any last minute work on the boats and a team meeting before launching at 12.30.

McAsey says the only problem they have encountered is the heat. "It just means making sure we keep up fluid intake and keeping out of the sun."

But not all of the action is out on the water. There are very skilled people who work long hours behind the scenes to ensure the sailing crew have reliable boats and equipment.

Felicity Lind-Mitchell, a sail maker for 14 years, was with Team New Zealand back in 2003 and rejoined in January 2005.

It is unusual to have a woman sail maker in Team New Zealand. There are four other women but Lind-Mitchell is the only one working directly with the yachts.

"There are a lot of excellent women sailors out there that get the respect they deserve of their male counterparts and that do it professionally.



SAIL MAKER: Felicity Lind-Mitchell cuts through the male stereotype.

"You still get the guys giving you a little ribbing now and then but you have to give as good as you get," she says.

Her days are just as hectic as the sailors' and can be anything from 10-12 hours. She has to pack the sails and load the boats for the day's sailing in the morning, then goes straight into making new sails. When the boats come back in she has to check them to see if they need repairing.

Some of the team's family members made the trip to Spain during the five-month stint.

"It is a great opportunity for them to experience Spain, especially the kids who are starting to speak Spanish and seeing a different culture to home," says Meacham.

Rigger Brad Marsh, who was recently in Alicante on the Mediterranean coast, says the scenery is amazing.

"It's very Mediterranean with the clay brick houses and beauti-

ful blue sea."

The crew still have plenty of praise for Auckland's harbour. "Auckland has been an incredible trial ground and very valuable to us," says Meacham.

"It has an infrastructure second to none to support the day-to-day operations, while the Hauraki Gulf still throws all sorts of conditions to us to test both the boat and crew."

McAsey adds, "Here you don't wake up and wonder what the weather will be like. You know what it will be like—hot and light!"

He says nothing compares to the excitement of New Zealanders when the America's Cup is held in Auckland.

He looks forward to returning in triumph with cup in hand. "Unlike New Zealand, Valencia is not full of people from all over the country excited about what is happening. That's why we are trying to bring it home!"

## Pre-Test fever in Auckland. Yeah Right.



Ben Burrowes

After experiencing the fervour in George St before a Carisbrook Test or the mayhem in Cathedral Square leading up to a Test at Jade Stadium, it is fair to say that the build up in Auckland pales in comparison.

No Queen St parades, no fanfare, no publicity.

Is Dick Hubbard not a rugby fan?

Perhaps he is still dirty at Sanitarium's Weet-Bix winning the race to sponsor the men in black. You're probably unlikely to find many All Black watches in a box of Dick's Bugs'n'Mud.

Maybe the problem stems from the provincial side. After limping through this year's Super 14 with problems both on and off the paddock, the Blues seem to face a mini identity crisis.

With an Aussie coach at the helm of a crew of Northland, North Harbour and Auckland players, the side struggled for consistency and the promise of "razzle dazzle" rugby never eventuated.

There's also been talk concerning whether Eden Park and Auckland city's infrastructure will be ready in time for the Rugby World Cup in 2011.

The Mayor and the council seem to be heading their priority list with the potential transport problem. Hubbard has been busy promoting the train system.

Although the "City of Rails" does have a nice ring to it.

Of more pressing concern could be the fact that Auckland may be another repeat of this year's Commonwealth Games in Melbourne where only days away from the opening, some 400,000 tickets were still for sale.

Nervous organisers gave away 5,000 tickets for the opening ceremony, and the venue was still not filled to capacity.

Obviously, Auckland won't face any problems of that magnitude but it will be interesting to see how many locals purchase tickets when they come up for sale. The tickets won't be cheap and that should be a "true rugby fan" test in itself.

Luckily, the other New Zealand provinces will be there in case Auckland needs a push over the line come 2011. It won't be the first time.

## World's best descend on Rotorua

by Helen Twose

New Zealand mountain bikers are bubbling with anticipation as the 2006 world mountain bike championships rides into Rotorua this month.

A purpose-built venue on Mount Ngongotaha will host more than 700 international mountain bikers at the International Cycling Union event. An expected 20,000 spectators will attend from August 22 to 27.

With the premier event being run on New

Zealand tracks for the first time, BikeNZ has taken the opportunity to send a 72-member squad to compete. In the past the national cycling organisation has sent between 15 and 30 member teams to the predominantly northern hemisphere-based competition.

BikeNZ team manager Rachel Smith says despite the larger team size there was a "huge battle" for the final places with almost all the team travelling to gain overseas experience.

"The athletes chose the best races in New Zealand or best opportunities overseas to

impress the selectors," she says.

For many of the seasoned athletes who compete on the elite European and North American circuits, a world championship on home soil is a rare chance to compete in front of parents, family and friends, says Smith.

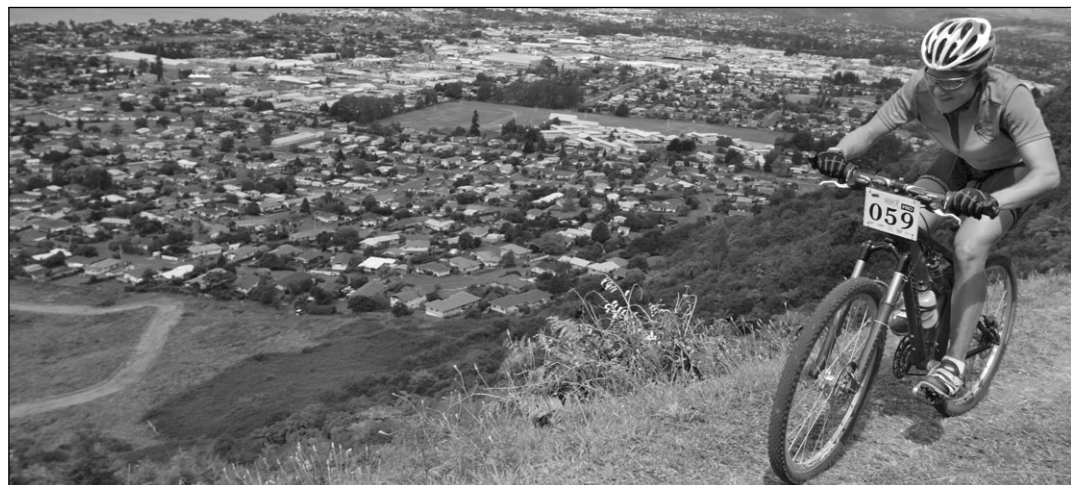
Former Commonwealth Games cyclist Sadie Parker-Wynyard agrees. "This is the world champs. This is the one and only shot at becoming a world champion."

Parker-Wynyard says she agrees with the policy of the elite riders gaining overseas experience before selection for the team.

She says when she first made the New Zealand team to go to the world championships after being placed fourth in the national championships, the level of international competition "was too big a step".

Parker-Wynyard says that while the local team go in as the under-dogs, having local support "when you're wanting to give up on a climb" or familiar faces cheering as riders come round a corner will boost the team.

"To have a big crowd yelling at you, you're just not going to back off. There is nowhere on that course you can hide, so it's a huge advantage," says Parker-Wynyard.



GEARING UP: A biker navigates one of the Rotorua trails.

### EVENT GUIDE

#### Cross Country

Riders race a 5.9km course for two hours, including a 320 metre vertical climb up Mt Ngongotaha. Each lap will be completed in around 20 minutes, with the top guys predicted to make the tough climb in under eight minutes. Cross country riding combines technical riding with endurance fitness.

#### Four Cross

Four riders race elbow-to-elbow on a 500 metre downhill track, with BMX-style jumps and berms. Races take less than a minute and the 13-metre tabletop jump will see riders flying up to 20 metres in the air. Fast and furious spectator friendly action.

#### Downhill

Riders clad in body armour will complete a series of jumps, off camber corners, huge drop-offs, and a 9-metre gap jump. Racing the clock down the 2.2km course will take the top riders under three minutes to descend 330 vertical metres. Not for the faint-hearted.

#### Trials

Technical skills rule in this event where riders complete a tricky obstacle course. Points are accumulated by the number of times riders touch the ground. The winner is the person with the least points. Spectators can expect to see riders skillfully "hopping" their bikes over rocks, logs, and man-made obstacles.

