

# HardTales in the Wild

Bloody Budgerigar - May 2004

The bloody budgie wouldn't shut up! Chirp Chirp Chirp! The noisy tweetie was doing my head in and no matter what I tried it wouldn't quit squawking. I figured it wanted a bath, often does, so I reached into its cage and grabbed him. I was gentle enough, but he got angry and started biting my hand just below the thumb. Shit it hurt, and then he bit again even harder. Soon my feathered friend was biting so viciously I thought he would draw blood. Then he bit so hard that my reflexes kicked in and I swatted the little bastard with my right hand and F\*#K ME!!!!

I woke bolt upright with an intense driving pain in my left thumb. Obviously I had been dreaming, you didn't think I would smack a Budgie did you? But the pain in my hand was real enough. It was Monday morning and I'd slept 11 hours solid before my rude awakening. I don't often get 11 hours straight, but considering my last sleep had been the preceding Friday, it had been well earned.

You often miss sleep when endurance sports are your thing. This weekend it had been the inaugural Sydney 24hour mountain bike race. It was my first 24 hour MTB race as well, courtesy of my team-mates brother who scored us a free entry. Our team was solid and the idea of racing relay style with three above average riders had drawn me out of a strict training regime to have a crack at something ... well, different.

Meeting the boys early for registration, a sighting lap of the track seemed a good idea, until the 1.5km mark that is. It wasn't even a technical section, but I lost concentration briefly and the front wheel went with it. Tucking away in some soft sand I reached out to catch the fall, but only managed to drive my thumb into a tree root, bending it back way past breaking point. I heard the pop and quickly snapped my good hand over it, knocking it back into place. "Are you ok?" Hugh asked. "Yeah" I lied, quickly picking myself up and dusting away the grit that now covered my side. "Bit loose that sand" I offered as I threw my leg back across the Raceline and pedalled off. I knew my thumb was stuffed but letting on was not in the immediate game plan. With a bit of ice and some ibuprofen, I figured I could get through the race without anyone being wiser to what had really happened.

Hugh and Craig were flying out there and lapping under thirty minutes each time around the Dargle circuit. Duncan had also lapped consistently with times in the low to mid thirties. Expecting the same from me, it probably had seemed odd when I pedalled into transition a little late. On the first race lap holding on was nearly impossible and the drugs weren't working. I hammered the flats and ran the uphill, only to tenderfoot it downhill. I just couldn't grip the bars and reaching the levers to brake and shift gears, wasn't happening. I finished a lap and wanted to pull into transition and tag someone else in, but they were expecting two laps

from me and wouldn't be ready anyhow. The second lap worsened the pain and by the 5km marker I was riding with one hand on the bars and the other against my chest. Not sure why, but whenever I'm hurt I either go into the foetal position or brace the injured part against my chest. The foetal position doesn't work when you're on a bike, so my chest won the company of the wounded appendage.

Pulling my glove off at our campsite, Duncan noticed me grimace "Are you ok?" then he saw the already black and very swollen digit that used to be a thumb. "You better get some ice on that" was all he said. Craig suggested "riding's probably not a good idea ... that looks broken". They were very understanding, but Hugh was still riding like a man possessed and we could actually get a good result here, even if the plan had been to 'just have a fun ride' as Hugh had put it when asking me to join them a week earlier. Fun! I was in agony and to make things worse I had forgotten to put deodorant on. Christ I stank!

We each peeled off two laps before night, then with the setting sun I squeezed into my gloves again and set out for a blast in the dark "You had better be waiting at transition just in case I can't do two laps" was the advice I gave Hugh before taking off. I was as happy as a pig in shit when I saw him at the end of the lap. It had been awful. My hand felt as though someone had smacked it with a mallet and then clamped it into vice for good measure, then an angel fell from the sky and landed in my lap. I'd SMS'd a mate before the event and let him know where to call in and say hello. The champion got the message and was kind enough to drag his girlfriend out into the bush to see us that night. Why was that a good thing you ask? Well, she's a veterinarian by trade, and seeing my hand all black, blue and swollen, sent my mate off to their car to get 'something for the pain and swelling'.

I'm buggered if I can remember the name of the tablets I took, and I'm buggered if I know what their intended purpose was, but the pain disappeared and the swelling went with it. "Don't ride again!" was her advice, but hey, what would she know, she was after all only a vet! Saddling up for another outing I sped off into the night to post my fastest lap times yet. I don't know what my angel gave me, but I whinnied like a horse as I thundered up the toughest pinch. On the second lap, the drug wore off, despite it supposedly being able to last '12 hours for dogs up to 50kg', and I looked forward to transition. Unfortunately, my newfound speed had caught Craig unaware and he wasn't ready for me. Setting off on a third lap with the piercing pain back in my hand and no water on my bike, wasn't what I wanted, but I took one for the team and set out once more.

When the sun came up I set out for two more laps and suffered alone out there in my silence. Pain gives you a clarity that can't be explained and as my heart beat through my temples and the sweat stung my eyes, I had an Epiphany, 'Matt, you're a bloody idiot!'.

We finished the race in 8th outright and given there were some 680 competitors the result was ok. My thumb is rooted and the bike needs a good wash, but even so I still had fun. Can't wait for the next one.

**Angry Man**

