

# HardTales in the Wild

Pure Determination - February 2004

With summer on the way out, the 2004 Kathmandu Maximum Adventure Series exploded into life on the peaceful waters of the Clyde River at Shallow Crossing (near Bateman's Bay NSW). Forecast temperatures were expected in the mid 20's, and light North Easterly winds predicted for the afternoon, but by midday, the mercury was well past the forecast and the humidity was closing in on the 18 teams hunting checkpoints.

Day 1 had started with a controversial 500 point time estimate challenge for the 13.5km boat paddle on the Clyde River. Teams had to estimate their time to complete the leg, however they would be penalised by 5 points for every minute they were behind the fastest team. The nasty bit was that even if you were faster than your estimated time, you would still be penalised the difference up to your estimate (or actual time if slower than your estimate). This meant that the fastest team, AROC Salomon, were actually awarded less points than second fastest team, HardTale, as Team HardTale were able to predict a closer estimate to AROC Salomon's actual time, and stay within that estimate. Team Phantom Torsos unfortunately estimated a time so far off the pace that they were penalised a disastrous 485 points despite completing the stage within half an hour of the leaders.

A five-hour foot Rogaine rounded out day one with more controversy as one of the checkpoints had been misplaced some 200m upstream of the grid reference and only Team Raid managed to find it. Many teams complained of losing precious time searching for the wayward marker and eventually all teams that could prove their presence in the correct grid reference (Team Raid were kind enough to leave a bib number) were awarded the points. By the end of day one, Team Raid, Team Bilby's and Team HardTale were locked in a points battle for the lead and with AROC Salomon and Team Millie in striking distance. The night navigation stage would be crucial. 2003 series champions, Team Crank, were hit hard by the misplaced markers and time estimator stage and found themselves chasing a huge points deficit to catch the leaders.

The night stage proved equally tough for all competitors and many teams braved the debris strewn waters to swim between four of the checkpoints in the 1.5 hour stage. Only team Millie were able to clear the course while Team AROC Salomon spent the night being hounded by Team Lost & Found. Teams HardTale, Bilby and Raid all had difficulties on this stage and saw their early lead in the event slip away as Millie and AROC Salomon powered to the front of the points table. Thoroughly drenched and out of breath, teams clamoured into their tents for what little sleep they could muster before the next days mountain bike challenge. Forecast temperatures were even higher for the final stage and with only 5 hours to cover up to 70km of very hilly terrain, the 8am start was a blessing.

At the start of the final day, Team Millie's consistency and night strategy had paid off and they lead Team AROC Salomon by 40 points. Team HardTale were a further 130 points behind and it would take a miracle to catch the leaders. Barring disaster, Team Bilby were the only team that could threaten HardTale's hold on third, whilst teams Crank, Lost & Found and Raid would battle it out for the minor placing's in the all male category.

While the two big guns (Team AROC, whose most recent success was 2nd at the worlds richest race, Primal Quest and Millie, filled with National and World champion athletes from several disciplines) gave it everything to secure the win, many teams found it tough just staying out on the hot and hilly course. With temperatures in the early 30's and humidity around 85%, teams often found themselves walking their bikes to cool down and dehydration was a real concern for race director Gary Farebrother. "Your biggest challenge will be the heat today, be sure to take plenty of water and ride within your limits." He briefed teams before the start. As the clock ticked over the five-hour mark, Millie waited anxiously for AROC to arrive. From the start it was clear that to win AROC would need to clear the entire course, which meant an additional 20klm loop for the furthest checkpoint. Only Team Bilby had managed this CP but at the expense of another, which meant their race for 3rd would fall short by 5 points. After nine minutes of overtime clock watching, team AROC arrived to the disbelief of Team Millie (Had AROC been 13 minutes late, penalties would have meant a win for Millie) and claimed the win. AROC's determination, experience and sheer quality shone through once again as they drew first blood in the 2004 Kathmandu Maximum Adventure Series. Team Millie were secure in second and Team HardTale third, despite three flat tyres and some very appreciated trackside assistance by team Perfect Strangers.

With less than 6 weeks until the next round in at the nations capital, teams were treated to a bevy of prizes from Kathmandu before heading home to clean up and make preparations for round two. If the form of the top teams is anything to go by, 2004 will be a sensational year for Australian adventure racing.

### **Angry Man**

