

HardTales in the Wild

The Straightest Arrow - May 2004

An 8am start to racing meant teams had actually been able to sleep in the lead up to this years Sydney Arrow. The race, held on the Central Coast of NSW, promised a furious pace with QLD Teams' Mountain Designs and Landrover, NSW hotshots Millie (now so strong they field two competitive teams) and Crank all looking fit and ready. Two New Zealand teams spear headed by Sierra International made the trip across the Tasman for the event and several teams from Victoria also journeyed north to test the pace.

On remarkably flat waters for May, some 50 boats sprinted off the beach at Lake Munmorah's Northern tip. As the field thundered toward the open waters of Tuggerah Lake however, some poorly positioned glow sticks jammed the rudder of one unsuspecting Mirage paddler and as their boat veered savagely to the left, the field was split into two groups; those affected by the wayward vessel, and those who cleared out. From the beach it was difficult to hear just what was said out there, but I don't think any invites for lunch were given. With over 30km of paddling ahead of them, there would be plenty of time to make up ground with smart navigation and teamwork.

For those of us with the unenviable job of support crewing, the next time we saw the racers was at TA1 on Wyong Creek. Team Mountain Designs powered into view less than two and a half hours after the start. Tuggerah Lake had been kind to them and choosing a K2 race boat gave them a four minute advantage over Millie in their Supersonic doubles. A couple more teams in supersonics and Your Name Here in an Adventure Duet followed closely before the first sea kayaks arrived. With three teams in Mirages side by side, boat design had definitely been a contributing factor.

In a whirlwind of transitioning teams, Local team 'HardTale' managed to forget their control card and lost valuable minutes returning for it. The look on many teams faces suggested that the day could only get better, or a lot worse.

For anyone familiar with the Watagan State Forest at the Wyong end, the 4km climb up Watagan Forest Rd would be no surprise, for the 100 or so competitors however, it was a nasty welcome to the first mountain bike stage. The second nasty surprise would come 10km later on a side track. A monster descent followed by a hike-a-bike climb before collecting CP2 masked the real gem of the side road. As competitors sped back to the main forest road, the track suddenly ended with an impassable cliff line. With the map suggesting otherwise, teams banked up as the search for a way round led some teams to retrace their steps all the way back from whence they'd come. The navigators with faith in the maps managed to find a sidetrack past this obstacle and continued at a furious pace to TA2. After 55km of undulating ridge line, with an emphasis on climbing, Mountain Designs still lead the charge with Millie in

hot pursuit. 10 minutes after Millie had departed for the foot Rogaine, no less than 5 teams thundered into transition within a minute of each other. It was on!

A mandatory kit check saw these five teams backlogged at the TA exit and the strain on competitor faces was beginning to show. If only they knew what was ahead. Only three hours separated these teams from the impending darkness and it had taken the course setter 6 hours to lay the foot stage checkpoints. One look at the map was enough to indicate that night would not be a fun time to complete this stage. The descents and climbs were near vertical, offering several rock climbing opportunities and the creek lines were thick with wait-a-while vines and dense undergrowth. Six teams cleared the stage before dark and one soon after. The rest of the field however would not be so lucky and the times for the stage slowed dramatically with the setting sun. Team Mountain Designs maintained their lead, but the race for second had stepped up a gear with five teams charging into transition.

Stage 4 brought another bike ride, this time with an emphasis on descending. Team Mountain Designs were never headed, and transition with the knowledge that their paddling had been unmatched 11 hours earlier. Team HardTale had charged into 2nd with some powerful riding, but yet another blunder with the control card cost them 6 minutes. This lost time was more than enough for Team Millie to pass them in the boats and for Teams Crank and Millie Too to catch up. Team Landrover, having lost time through a team member cramping badly, appeared soon after to jump into their boats. They had been quick in the boats earlier and would need the same again to make up lost time.

Waiting on a rocky point near coon Island, trying to spot the mandatory glow sticks competitors had on their jackets and boats was like trying to spot a particular bee in a hive! There were just so many lights around Lake Macquarie. Then we heard some voices and the gathering crowd called out to them. It was Team Mountain Designs, they were a little tired after nearly 13 hours of hammering through the Central Coast, but were sure to get a good nights rest. Team Millie finished second with Team HardTale in 3rd. Less than five minutes later Teams Crank and Millie Too sprinted for the finish. It had been a super fast race and possibly the most competitive field to date. Any one of 6 teams were in the hunt all race and it was the pure boat speed of Mountain Designs that gained the advantage.

The rest of the field, with the exception of one team member from one team, filtered across the line over the course of the next 12 hours, making the 2004 Sydney Arrow one of the most successful adventure races yet. Well done to the competitors, volunteers and organisers for a very memorable event for all the right reasons.

Angry Man

