

The ARC 24 2006 was possibly the best race we've put together. Orion Health had two teams entered in the race and we came 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, comfortably ahead of the competition.

The Orion Health teams were made up of Anna Berthelsen, Stuart Lynch, Carl Bevins and myself in one team and Alysha Blackwell, Ross Rotherham, Wayne Hodgetts and Brent Edwards in the other.

Not only did we race well, but we enjoyed ourselves immensely, rating this year's ARC as one of the most entertaining and well organised races that we've done. Despite the race requiring only basic navigation there was a good mix of trekking, mountain biking (both on road and off), and kayaking. One of my favorite legs, and I'm sure the favorite of many other racers, was the river run up to the McLaren Falls.

There were many firsts for me in this race, it was the first time I'd raced without Lynne in the support crew, since she was racing in the ARC 12, the first time we'd raced with two Orion Health teams, the first time I'd raced with Anna Berthelsen, and the first time we'd entered a race as favorites, trying to defend our title won in 2005.

The race started on the Mount Maunganui beach (Shark Alley) with a kayak beach launch into a relatively small surf. Keith (race organiser) timed the start perfectly, just as a bigger set came through, and just before he got too deep to stand up! The first wave that hit us was a decent one and it smacked me about a bit in the front of the boat, taking my hat off along with my map. We had four checkpoints to get on the first leg, which ended with a swim across the Wairoa river to the Waimarino Aquatic Park, where we had to jump off a high platform into the river or slide down the waterslide. Once back across the river we mountain biked a short distance to the next transition at the Ruahihi Dam where we ran up the Wairoa river, to McLaren Falls.

The river run started with heart pumping 10m jump off a rock into a large pool in the river. It was a spectacular river run, which saw us clambering over huge boulders, which make for a good grade 5 river run when the dam is released. Luckily the water wasn't flowing as a grade 5 river when we made our way upstream over the boulders and across or around the pools.

The two Orion teams hit the lead early in the race, with only the two man team of Phil White and Garth Spencer ahead of us on this section. Helped by our superb support crew of Gavin Martin, MumO and Anna's Dad Allan and sister Tinika, we barely had time to blink in transition before we were hurried away on our bikes. This leg involved a couple of new adventures, an abseil (without our bikes), a swim up a very cold gorge (again without our bikes), and finally a swim across a lake, this time with our bikes (and the help of some tractor tyres).

The next leg required us to put our 'high visibility' hats on so that we didn't get shot at by hunters in the Kaimai ranges. We made good time running most of the way over the fast bush trails. Our destination was Wairere Falls, NZ's highest waterfall, on the

Matamata side of the Kaimais. We passed Phil and Garth on this leg, to hit the lead overall in the 24 hour race.

One third of the way through the leg we split into two groups of two, so that we could collect two checkpoints on different trails before converging again near the falls. We sent the two hares, Stu and Carl, on what appeared to be the longest of the two trails, while Anna and I took the 'shorter route'. While it may have been shorter, it certainly wasn't faster, as the trail Anna and I took was very overgrown and had a warning on it recommending trampers not to take it! Despite not having a map (oops, left it in transition), and leaving the faint trail about 6 or 7 times, we made good time and the others only had 10 minutes to wait for us at our agreed reunion place. We continued down the steep path to the bottom of the falls and a happy support crew who provided us with some good cheer, food, drink and bikes for the next leg, another short ride to the Te Aroha river. All day we'd been working well together as a team on the bikes and continued to draft off Carl (it's not about the bike) Bevins.

An interesting boat entry followed at the next transition as Anna and Carl climbed down ropes suspended off a bridge while Stu and I paddled a double kayak each into position for 'the monkeys' to drop into their cockpits. We made it down this stage in quick time without hitting any floating cows, even though we smelt a couple, and on this stage we hit the front of the race, ahead of all 24 and 12 hour teams.

The format of the race had the 12 and 24 hour teams following the same 'rough' course, with the 24 hour teams having a few extra activities and checkpoints to retrieve. This made the event more social as often we found ourselves returning to the 12 hour course after doing an extra little loop on various legs and meeting up with the 12 hour competitors. It was great to see so many happy and enthusiastic adventurers out racing in the 12 hour event.

Following the paddle towards TeAroha, we jumped back on our trusty steeds and headed for the rifle range. The boys were all pretty familiar with weapons of mass destruction so we were able to coach Anna a little on how to kills little metal duckies.

At this transition the Pizza was on offer, and I ate loads of it! This leg was another trek, with the option of splitting, so while Anna and I found the lower checkpoints and took a short sleep, Stu and Carl climbed Mt TeAroha. We had a little bit of trouble finding each other again, but did so and went into transition well ahead of when our crew and the transition marshal expected us. Mum was a bit upset that the quiche was not yet fully warmed up but that didn't stop us all tucking into it! ;o)

The penultimate leg was to take us over Thomsons Track by mountain bike, and back to the east side of the Kaimai Ranges to Aongatete, near Katikati. The uphill lasted about an hour, but our spirits were high and we enjoyed each others company and hardly noticed the effort required to make the ascent to 580m. The downhill required about 20 dismounts as we negotiated a seemingly never ending collection of muddy boggs, some big and deep enough to swallow up the whole team, with room for a few eels too!

We finally made it out of the boggs, carrying a fair bit of extra weight in the form of mud up to our thighs and all over our bikes. We had a scream screaming down the final hill and into transition where our Insomniac racing kayaks were waiting for us, and we'd made it just in the nick of time. We paddled across Tauranga harbor on an outgoing tide, and only just made it over some sand banks. We felt for those behind us that would have trouble negotiating the lower water levels or would battle the incoming tide all the way to the Mount.

Pulling into the beach at Pilot Bay we were greeted by Rita and some of the many great marshals who had volunteered to help out around the course ... and also cheering us onto dry land was our fantastic support crew ... they Rocked!

Both Orion Health teams would like to thank Horleys for their fantastically drinkable energy boosting isotonic sports drink, Replace. Thanks also to New Balance who make what we reckon is the best adventure racing shoe on the market, the 907. Our great Day Two kayak gear definitely made us go faster and more comfortably in our Insomniacs on the water. Our Lupine lights are second to none, bar none ... there's a lot to be said for having the ability to turn night into day at the flick of a switch! Thorlos definitely save feet so our thanks to them! And without a doubt Mountain Hardwear gear rules – dry and warm definitely gets the vote ahead of damp and cold!

But most of all and highest on the Thank You list must be our principal sponsor - Orion Health. We are truly grateful that they have extended their innovative and “go forward” approach to business to supporting our teams and giving us the opportunity to “go forward” and enjoy the great sport that is adventure racing!