

## Racing takes centre stage again

SO last weekend there was a dearth of cycle races with the racing snakes having to get their endorphin rush from a training session, but things change over the next few weeks with no less than nine events taking place over three weekends.

Starting today there is the first of two gravity events: the third leg of the KZN Enduro Series at Karkloof which is followed, as always, by the third downhill event tomorrow. The weekend then wraps up with the third leg of the Quattro ROAG Series, the Holla Sugar Rush Classic with a host of distances so there is a race for anybody who rides a bicycle (except maybe those who are too scared to get off the tar of course).

Next weekend sees the track riders have a league event on Saturday at the Cyril Geoghean Cycle Stadium and then the Compendium Burg Wheelers MTB Race at St Ives – and that is where I start thinking that something needs to change.

Absolutely nothing wrong with the St Ives event, but the following weekend there are three events all within just over 150kms of St Ives. That means four races dividing the limited MTB market within a week.

On Friday June 29 to July 1 is a new race, The Midlands Stage Race, in the Howick / Karkloof area; the next day the Ride The Berg event starts at All Out Adventures and on Sunday the Gooderson Drak Gardens MTB Challenge take place. The weekend wraps up with the Dafco Urban Challenge which is thankfully far away at Toti and gives the South Coast riders a chance to race.

Now I understand the school holidays make the end of June and early July prime event time, and the Midlands / Berg area attracts big holiday crowds, but four events within eight days in a relatively tight area seems like a recipe for race organisers to fight over limited entries – or a lose-lose scenario.

Surely it would make sense to have moved two of the events to the following two weekends when there are no Midlands / Berg events, and they would still fall firmly within the prime holiday season?

The bottom line is that on the final weekend of June riders have to choose one (and only one) of three events – either a one-day, a two day or a new two- or three-day stage race.

What would I do? I would happily do any one of the three events and I say that having competed in the first, ridden large tracts of trail from the second and having had long discussions and knowing quite a bit about the final event.

The Drak Gardens race is a superb one-day event that is always well organised and worth doing; Ride the Berg has loads of great single track and is well organised by a passionate mountain biker, but is a deceptively tough event that suits "real" mountain bikers; while The Midlands Stage Race is a new event and it looks to me as if first-time event organiser Johnny St Clair Gibson is going to make his mark on mountain biking – and I mean that in a good way.

I am going to stick my neck out and say Johnny, whose background includes organising Asian Tour golf tournaments, is putting together a race that will be well worth the relatively cheap price he is charging for the two- or three-day options.

He is super enthusiastic and I know this opening event is unlikely to turn a profit for him (he recently signed a sponsor and immediately made the decision to drop the entry fee and will be refunding early entrants – for me that speaks volumes about a man who wants to put his clients (riders) ahead of making a big profit). My impression is that he is aiming to build something that becomes one of the iconic, must-do races on the calendar and he is prepared to pull out all the

stops in year one to set a standard other races will aspire to.

The route is being put together by Gavin Ryan who has a lot to do with the Howick MTB Club and anybody who has ridden the Howick and Karkloof trails will know that the area is laden with spectacular riding.

If I was even vaguely fit enough to contemplate riding a race, I think I would opt for the Midlands Stage Race, largely because I think riders are in for a great experience, with some new innovations on a course that will be good fun but not too tough. I also like the idea the price is not excessive and offers different packages based on whether riders opt for full food and accommodation or just a daily post-race lunch.

I just wish riders did not have to make a decision and could do all three events if they wanted.

Entries for the Midlands close on Friday, Ride the Berg entries close next Monday and the rest close two or three days before the event.

And finally, something even more depressing than a clashing race calendar ...

This week I received two requests for crowd funding and if I was a millionaire I would contribute heavily to both:

1) Top elite KZN rider Stuart Marais who (as I have written about before) may be forced to give up pro cycling. Please go to [www.addabit.com/fund/1mZrNdzjxp](http://www.addabit.com/fund/1mZrNdzjxp) to help keep one of KZN's best on his bike for a few more weeks.

2) Jason Hall (of Good2Go bike shop fame) crashed last weekend and has broken his neck and spine. Please go to [gofundmesa.co.za/support-jason-goal-r300-000/](http://gofundmesa.co.za/support-jason-goal-r300-000/) and help.

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### KZN CYCLING EVENTS

MTB	KZN Primary School Eliminator Series #6 – Pmb	Sat	9-Jun-18
MTB	National MTB Series # 4 - Mankele	Sat	16-Jun-18
MTB	KZN Enduro Series # 3	Sat	16-Jun-18
MTB	KZN Downhill Series # 3	Sun	17-Jun-18
MTB	The Holla Sugar Rush Classic	Sun	17-Jun-18
Track	KZN Track League #3	Sat	23-Jun-18
MTB	Compendium Burg Wheelers MTB Race	Sun	24-Jun-18
MTB	The Midlands Stage Race	Fri	29-1 Jul-18
MTB	Ride The Berg	Sat	30-1 Jul-18
MTB	Gooderson Drak Gardens MTB Challenge	Sun	1-Jul-18
MTB	Dafco Urban Challenge	Sun	1-Jul-18
MTB	Lap Racing Challenge Championships - Mazarat Park	Sun	8-Jul-18
MTB	KZN Enduro Championships	Sat	14-Jul-18