

Up for challenging race

RUNNING

By Jamie Troughton

Sjors Corporaal turned up in Whakatane yesterday clean-shaven for the first time in a year and proceeded to show a clean pair of heels to everyone chasing.

The 32-year-old Galatea farmer romped home in the 18km Toi's Challenge, the first race in the North Island Triple Crown series, winning by more than 2 minutes to confirm his series favouritism.

He's no stranger to Triple Crown success — having won the series-ending The Goat Run on Mt Ruapehu for the last two years — but he also confirmed his wise decision to take running a bit more seriously this year.

"I'm doing a lot more running and it's paid off. In previous years, I was relying on natural fitness from hunting and farming but I've been getting up to 80km a week and I joined the Lake City club as well," Corporaal said.

Minus the bushy beard and frizzy hair that has become his trademark, Corporaal cut a semi-anonymous figure for much of yesterday's race, before cutting loose in the hills on the homeward journey from Ohope.

He clocked 1h 17m 56s, heading home Hamilton's Kerry Suter by 2m 03s and leaving his rival awe-struck.

"He's incredible — he's like a cross between Fred Dagg and Sir Edmund Hillary, the quintessential Kiwi bloke," Suter marvelled. "You can't complain about being beaten by someone like that. The thing about Sjors is that he's fitter than he is strong but he's still really strong."

Tauranga's Iain MacDonald was third, ahead of incredible Rotorua 53-year-old Colin Earwaker, who shattered his own masters record by nearly 2 minutes to finish fourth in 1h 25m 58s.

On a decent day for Rotorua runners, Annika Smail also showed her strength on the hills in the second half of the event, pulling ahead of Whakatane local Karen Hanlen to win the women's race in 1h 37m 30s.

Like Corporaal, Smail also triumphed in The Goat last year and it ignited the running bug in the former top mountain biker.

"I really enjoyed The Goat last year and thought I'd give the Triple Crown a go," Smail, also 32, said. "I've ended up doing more running this year because it's easier to fit in during the week when I go out in winter after work."

Corporaal and Smail have just a six-day turnaround before the next event in the series — the Great Cranleigh



TRUE MASTER: Rotorua's Colin Earwaker on his way to a new masters record and fourth place overall.



TOP WOMAN: Rotorua's Annika Smail fights through the traffic on her way to victory.

Kauri Run on the Coromandel Peninsula.

It's the longest of the three events at 32km and that's got Corporaal a little nervous.

"Hopefully the body holds out — I've never run 32km in my life," Corporaal said.

"I got up to 25km in a training run but that was just plodding along."