

Brutal battle takes over the streets

Entry numbers up for 'best motorcycle racing NZ has to offer'

Motorcycling
Andy McGechan

Whanganui is bracing itself for the brutal annual street fight that often leaves spectators hungry for more.

Whanganui's iconic Cemetery Circuit motorcycle race has been running every Boxing Day for the past 70 years.

The organisers certainly know what they're doing by now and the many thousands of spectators who flock to the central North Island city each year can confirm that.

Once again spectators can expect the festive magic and madness to continue on for at least another 24 hours after Christmas Day.

The popular three-round Suzuki International Series is now marking its 13th season. The Cemetery Circuit race is the traditional final showdown.

The 2020 edition of the Suzuki International Series kicked off at Taupo's Bruce McLaren Motorsport Park on the first weekend in December and Manfeild Circuit Chris Amon, in Feilding, followed as host venue for round two a week later, on December 13.

Racers head to Whanganui for the final throw of the dice today.

Every season the safety barriers are put up alongside Whanganui's world-renowned motorcycle "street fight", with straw bales positioned and spectator fencing laid out along the gutters of the city's public streets.

Started in 1951, the Cemetery Circuit event is likely to be another scorcher this Boxing Day, both in terms of the sun beating down and of bike riders trying to beat each other to the chequered flag.

Leading riders expected to challenge for the top honours include Taupo's two-time former Suzuki International Series champion and current national superbike No.2 Scott Moir, Glen Eden's former national 600cc and superbike champion Daniel Mettam, Wellington's two-time former national superbike champion Sloan Frost, Whanganui firebrand Jayden Carrick, Auckland's Dave Sharp, powerhouse Whakatane brothers Mitch and Damon Rees, Whanganui's multi-talented Richie Dibben and Te Awamutu's Dave Hall.

In addition to the glamour Formula One class, there are races for Formula Two (600cc bikes), Formula Three, Bears



It will again be fierce and frantic on the streets of Whanganui on Boxing Day today. PHOTO / ANDY MCGECHAN

(non-Japanese bikes), 150cc GIXXER Cup class racers, pre-89 Post Classics, F1 Sidecars, F2 Sidecars, Supersport 300 and Super Motard (dirt bike) riders.

The bike racers will hare down Ridgeway St, along Wilson St, into Taupo Quay and Heads Rd, before looping around Guyton St and back into Ridgeway again, all of it at eye-watering speeds, often in excess of 200km/h.

It is counted as the premier street race venue in the Southern Hemisphere.

The 1.6km course has eight corners, a railway crossing, an overbridge and blind s-bends, flanked on either side by graveyard headstones.

Thousands of spectators will cram every nook and cranny as bikes race past almost within touching distance.

Riders can't believe it and spectators love it.

You have to be there on Boxing Day to see who takes out the series overall and, of course, to witness who claims the most

sought-after, one-off Robert Holden Feature race trophy.

Series promoter and organiser Allan "Flea" Willacy said entry numbers are up on last year and he expects the final round on the Cemetery Circuit will be an "absolute cracker".

"We are in an enviable position in New Zealand, considering what's been happening around the Covid-19 pandemic, with spectators able to travel and watch these events up close and personal

here in New Zealand. So, let's show the rest of the world how we get behind our motorsport, put on your sun hat, slap on the sunblock and come and watch the best motorcycle racing that New Zealand has to offer."

Class leaders after the second of three rounds in the 2020 Suzuki International Series are Christchurch's Alastair Hoogenboezem (Formula One); Rangiora's Avalon Biddle (Formula Two); Nikau Valley's Richard Markham-Barrett

(Formula Three); Wellington's Malcolm Bielski (Bears Senior); Whanganui's Blane Hannah (Bears Junior); Levin's Justin Maunder (GIXXER 150 Cup); Hastings' Gian Louie (Post Classics, pre-89 Senior); Ngaruawahia's Steve Bridge (Post Classics, pre-89 Junior); Tauranga's Barry Smith and Stu Dawe (F1 Sidecars); Albany's Mark Halls and Michelle MacLean (F2 Sidecars); Taumarunui's Jette Josiah (Super Motard); Timaru's Harry Parker (Supersport 300).

Waiting game for Hourigan

Tennis
Iain Hyndman

Professional Whanganui tennis ace Paige Hourigan is racking up national titles while marking time to see if she and her international doubles partner receive a wildcard entry into the Australian Open in February.

Hourigan arrived back to the family home in Turakina three weeks ago, before slipping away to Wellington last weekend to successfully defend her New Zealand women's singles title and retain the national No 1 ranking.

Safely through that tough encounter with a 5-7 6-4 6-1 victory over 15-year-old Vivian Yang, Hourigan was back at the family home awaiting news of whether she and Indonesian doubles partner Aldila Sutjiadi had made the cut to play in the Australian Open.

In the meantime, Hourigan had given her uncle, David Butters, the green light to sign her up for the Aotearoa Māori Tennis Championship to be hosted in Whanganui for the first time in 93 years.

"I think I played in this tournament once and won it when I was about 15 or 16 - mum [Tracy Hourigan] will know," Hourigan said.

The Aotearoa Māori Tennis Cham-



Kiwi No 1 Paige Hourigan is loving time at home in Whanganui while she awaits news of a possible wildcard entry to the Australian Open. PHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

ampionship will be played over three days at the Whanganui Tennis Club and courts at Whanganui Collegiate School starting on Sunday.

"I'm not sure if I'm just playing singles or doubles. I just said to Uncle David to sign me up. But it's great to be back playing competition tennis again after an interrupted year. I've been overseas, mostly in America with some time in Egypt during a year disrupted by Covid-19. I was mainly playing exhibition

tournaments in North America, which allowed us to earn a few dollars and I've had two trips back home in that time doing quarantine both times.

"I had to leave after playing one tournament in Egypt so I could finish quarantine in time for Christmas. Vouchers for spots in quarantine are difficult to get, so when mum said she had found one, I had to miss some tennis in Egypt to get home in time."

Hourigan said it had been a rough

debut to her professional career with the death of her shearing contractor father, Phill Hourigan, in August last year and most of 2020 interrupted by Covid-19.

"I really haven't had a full professional season without interruption, so it has been difficult, but it's great to be home and it's great to be playing competitive tennis while I'm here. I'm happy enough with my form, but now it's just a waiting game to see what opens up for me tournament-wise."

Concert Hall needs some tempo

Horse racing

The quiet achievers of New Zealand's black type racing season may need just one thing to add a group one at Ellerslie: a genuine tempo in the \$200,000 Zabeel Classic.

Training partners Roger James and Robert Wellwood sit second on the trainers' premiership for black type wins this term with four, an impressive strike rate in elite level races for a stable which has had only 87 starters this season.

What they really want, what all trainer want, are Group 1 victories though and James believes in Concert Hall they have the horse to pull that off in the highlight of today's mega meeting at Ellerslie. But he wants the race turn into a war of attrition.

"We want some tempo in the race, I don't want to see them dawdling in front and then kicking hard," James told the Herald.

"We are likely to get back, especially from a wishful draw, and these weight-for-age races at Ellerslie can some times be dominated by the leaders.

"But if they go a bit harder and the swoopers come into it she [Concert Hall] can win because she is very well and ready for the steps up to 2000m."

Concert Hall has looked a stronger, more mature mare this season winning at group two and three levels over 1600m, while she was a brave second to a race rival today in Rock On Wood over the 1600m of the Captain Cook at Trentham three weeks ago.

She has winning form up to 2300m and

Boxing Day meeting

■ **What:** One of New Zealand horse racing's biggest days of the year.
■ **Where:** Ellerslie racecourse, Auckland.

■ **When:** Today, first race 12.30pm.
■ **Highlights:** Zabeel Classic (Group 1), Jamieson Park Eight Carat Classic (Group 2), Hallmark Stud Sprint (listed), Shaw Wire Ropes Uncle Remus (listed), \$80,000 Stella Artois Championship.

■ **The punt:** All odds and options available at www.tab.co.nz

■ **Today's other meetings:** Awapuni gallops, Wingatui gallops, Westport harness.

a hard run 2000m looks ideal for her now.

A frenetic tempo could also test the reserves of rivals like Rock On Wood and Gino Severini but the reality for punters is the Zabeel is a true group one with at least six or seven horses in play as winning chances.

The Zabeel isn't the only chance for James and Wellwood to add to their black type tally today with chances in three other major races today but it is Cheaperhandivorce in the \$100,000 Jamieson Park Eight Carat Classic that excites them the most.

She only won a Rotorua maiden last start but did so like a filly going places, maybe even to the winner's circle after today's group two. "We really like her, she has class," offers James.

Māori tennis championships back in city after 93 years

Tennis
Logan Tutty

An historic tennis tournament that hasn't taken place in Whanganui for close to a century returns this week.

The Aotearoa Māori Tennis Championships begins this weekend, with over 120 players from around the country participating in the three day tournament.

The tournament returns to Whanganui for the first time in 93 years, taking place from December 27 to 29 at the Whanganui Tennis Club and Whanganui Collegiate School.

President Dick Garratt and secretary/treasurer Geoff Kaye were in Whanganui in March earlier this year confirming all the arrangements.

Garratt said it has been a bit of a



The Aotearoa Māori Tennis Championships are back in Whanganui after 93 years, featuring Trish Biddle-Amorua, Dick Garratt, Geoff Kaye and Paula Fore. PHOTO / BEVAN CONLEY

process organising the tournament, but everything is good to go.

"The main purpose for hosting the

tournament in Whanganui was on the request for the development of their junior program for our rangatahi (young people) down there."

Garratt said Whanganui has a very strong history of tennis, including hosting the inaugural Marumaru Cup in 1907. There is a huge history of Māori tennis within the area.

There are grades for all players and ages, all the way from under 10s to over 75-year-olds.

The tournament will also be graced with New Zealand tennis royalty, as Ruia Morrison will be present at the opening powhiri.

Morrison was the first New Zealand woman and the first Māori person to play at Wimbledon and reached the quarter-finals in 1957.

Whanganui's own and New Zealand's

top seeded female Paige Hourigan will make a hometown appearance at the tournament.

Hourigan enters the tournament in strong form after defending her national singles title at the Wellington Open NZ Championships last weekend.

She will have her eyes on current title holder Kalais Going from Tauranga and former champion Lucy Barlow.

Cousin of Hourigan and former Whanganui number one Kyle Butters, along with his family, will also be taking part in the tournament.

Garratt said they will keep registrations open until the last minute so those interested in playing get the chance to do so.

All players interested in registering, visit <http://amta.co.nz/wordpress/tournament/>.

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Thank you for your continued support throughout the year. Our offices will be closed from noon on Wednesday 23 December, and will re-open at 8.30am on Tuesday 5 January, 2021. We wish you a safe and happy holiday season.



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