



Media release

Talented field of favourites wide open for 2018 Le Race

The 2018 edition of Le Race will be wide open as nearly 20 top male riders could have realistic ambitions to win the iconic 100km race from Christchurch to Akaroa.

The strong field this Saturday will offer cycling fans along the route an intriguing mix of experienced professionals and the superstars of the future.

The rankings this year caused some major headaches for the race director due to the number of quality riders, before he settled on former national champion and Le Race record holder Michael Vink for the No.1 bib. The event will this year be a family affair for the Vink family with uncle Cor Vink battling for the minor places further back.

In the women's race, Kate Mcllroy should be the red-hot favourite, on the eve of her third Commonwealth Games. It will be her first Games on the bike after previously competing in the steeplechase and triathlon.

Unfortunately, Le Race did not fit the Games schedule for last year's winner Charlotte Lucas, so Mcllroy on paper should have too much class for the rest of the women's.

Jojo Bauer, younger sister of Pro Tour rider Jack Bauer, finished in the top five last year and will again be near the front, as well as Masters World Champion Jeannie Blackmore, who last year claimed the rainbow jersey in the time trial in Perth.

In the pre-race chatter between the male competitors, many consider Christchurch professional Daniel Whitehouse the man to beat.

The featherweight climber is suited to the steep hills of Banks Peninsula, but the 23-year-old is playing down his chances after having his appendix removed only four weeks ago.

"I raced in the Sun-Herald race in Australia and was one of the favourites for the Tour of Indonesia at the start of the year, but wasn't firing on all cylinders. It was frustrating because I could not figure out what was wrong with me. When I came back to Christchurch,

my appendix burst, so at least I felt vindicated why I hadn't performed to my ability," says Whitehouse who has just resumed training again in the past week.

"We'll see how it goes, but I definitely want to win Le Race. I got close in 2014 and haven't been able to do Le Race in the past three years, so I've got some unfinished business." First, he will have to shake off power riders like Vink, last year's winner Brad Evans, 2017 runner-up Sam Horgan and experienced local Paul Odlin.

At 39 years, Odlin may no longer be a pro rider but is still considered a genuine threat. He has lost count in how many editions of Le Race he has competed, and he is another rider with unfinished business after leading the race in 2014 before crashing on the final descent. "Le Race is a special event for Christchurch so it's good to see so many good local riders making an effort to be here."

Many of the New Zealand riders will be swarming off across the globe after this event, so Le Race is a unique opportunity to check out the next Hayden Roulston, as well as the Olympic medallist himself.

One of those talents is Christchurch 21-year-old Ollie Jones who recently signed with glamour team Dimension Data after beating 9000 other riders across the globe in an online competition through cycling data platform Zwift. The 21-year-old produced superior cycling statistics and will now be rubbing shoulders with British super star Mark Cavendish.

Many cycling observers are also keen to see the Pithie brothers go head to head. Older sibling Campbell finished fifth in 2017 and is considered a real threat for the \$1000 prizemoney, while younger brother Lawrence put the cycling world on notice last month by claiming an astonishing seven national age-group titles on the track.

"I've mainly been doing work on the track and not much training on the road, so we'll see how we go on Saturday. I am aiming for the podium but that may be an ambitious target," says the 15-year-old who has not been able to compete in Le Race before because to the age limit.

Keagan Girdlestone is continuing his amazing comeback on Saturday after his horrific crash in June 2016 that nearly claimed his life.

The youngest ever winner of Le Race in 2014, made an emotional return to Le Race last year, only nine months after his crash. He finished 19 minutes behind the winner, but will be expecting to get a lot closer this year.

Behind the elite riders, hundreds of recreational riders will be facing their personal battles in teams or individually, on tandems or mountainbikes, for the full 100km or the shorter version, Le Petite, which finishes in Little River.

Among the team riders, rugby fans may recognise Southbridge's first World Cup winner, Albert Anderson, who played at lock in the 1987 World Cup winning All Blacks.

Le Race has a mixture of challenging hill climbs, fast flats and exhilarating downhill that travels from Christchurch, across an extinct volcano, to the French surrounds of Akaroa.

Harcourts Holmwood is offering \$500 for the rider who beats the men's or women's race record, while climbers vie for the Sign of the Kiwi King and Queen of the Mountain titles. The Ross Bush Memorial Trophy is again for the best under-16 rider while the Envormation Vintage Cup winner is determined based on a combination of bike frame age and race time.

Le Race starts in Cathedral Square on March 24 at 8am, and finishes in Akaroa.



Caption:

Some of Christchurch's top riders that will be aiming for the podium on Saturday, top from left, Campbell Pithie and Josh Scott, bottom from left, Daniel Whitehouse, Keagan Girdlestone, Laurence Pithie, Reon Nolan and Paul Odlin.

For more information please contact Coen Lammers 021-730239