

The Season Begins – 2 February 2009

Well, the start of the 2009 race season for me has been a little disappointing. After the final race of 2008, I decided to have a good break. After all, I hadn't really had a break for 8 years but now I'm thinking maybe it was a little too long!?

Not really, My main focus for 2009 is the World Championships in Stromlo so I only just began to get into some serious training a week or so before the National Championships in Stromlo. I knew that it wasn't ideal for the Nationals but to stay focused for the year, having a break was crucial. So that's what I did, and it was great!

Come the Nationals though, I wasn't feeling quite as fit as I normally do and my skills were a little rusty. I was stoked to be riding though and my first run down the DH track at Stromlo was great. I was testing the new Giant prototype downhill bike which was feeling really good on the track, especially for my first run down.

Second run, not so good.... I tagged my handlebar on a tree at the top of the rock garden and landed about half way down pretty much on my head.

I don't crash that often, maybe once every few races so I figured that would be it for crashing for a while. I was wrong.

The rest of practice went pretty well. I went for a fast run for my last run on Sunday and about half way down, managed to crash again at a pretty good speed and remove about half the skin from my fore arm.

Figuring that that would be definitely be it for crashes, I was feeling pretty good for the race on Monday. I had a pretty good moment in my qualifying run, nearly running of the track about half way down but held onto it and qualified 6th with plenty of gas left in the tank for my final run.

My final run started of perfectly. I absolutely nailed everything. I remember jumping the last jump in Triple Treat and thinking, that's it, it's easy from here on down and promptly slid out in the next left hand berm. "You have to be kidding" I thought. I got up pretty quickly but on a track like Stromlo, one big mistake like that and you are done.

I cruised down and although I was really disappointed, I was also really happy with my run until I crashed, so it wasn't too bad. It also made me pretty happy to see local Ben Cory finish equal third with Amiel Cavalier and Mick Hannah win after taking a year off. It was a good race and I had a great time. Better luck next year I guess!

Next weekend was a national round in Mt Buller. I've always done well at Buller except for the last time I was there and I broke my wrist..... It took me a while to get up to speed but by qualifying I was feeling pretty good.

I hadn't crashed all through practice so I decided to have a good crack in qualifying. I made it about 100 meters before I crashed.... again. As I rode off I heard a young spectator yell out- "how's that new prototype working for you" followed by some laughs. Little punk! Pretty funny though.

I got up and finished my run and qualified in 20th position. Another crash! Come on. I never crash. I had joked with Mick Hannah earlier in the week about "Head First Hannah", after he had 3 consecutive seasons of injuring himself at the first World Cup, but now he was calling me "Head First Rando." Awesome.

My race run wasn't much better. I didn't crash (which was the best part of it) but the rest was terrible. I just couldn't get into the groove of things, made mistakes everywhere and ended up in 13th place. Lucky 13 I guess. I can't remember the last time I was out of the top 5 at a National in Australia, let alone the top 10!

So, after two weeks of crap races, I'm ready to make sure that it won't happen again. I'm well rested and really looking forward to a good season and now have about two months before my first race in the US and then the first World Cup in South Africa. I'm done crashing for the year so it's going to be sweet!

Jared