

Fiona Meade, on Location in New Zealand bringing you the latest news update on women's cycling across the waters!

What brought be here you might ask? Very easy to answer that...escape...from the weather firstly and now I'm happy to have escaped a lot of doom and gloom!

I arrived in Aukland 31.12.08 just rearing to get going on the bike! I spent most of January and February doing a lot of miles and a couple of cycle challenges...maybe a few too many miles cause by the time the racing came around I was finding it hard to find my legs(..Nothing really new for someone who knows me ;-))

The first race, a stage race was due to be 16<sup>th</sup> January but unfortunately two days before I had a bad fall off a motor cross bike(note to self: never try riding a motor bike 1)2 days before a race and 2)off road as a first time ever on a motor bike) which left me in a sling for a couple a days, luckily though nothing was broken and it was just a joint strain...still the pain made me feel nauseous, dont think I'd ever handle a fracture!

So, 30.01.09 became the first race, a 25minute+ 1 lap criterium called the north shore grand prix (<http://www.smartsport.co.nz/>). Nerves was a great warm up for me, they had my heart rate racing with my brain telling me "please let hang me in there and make an ass of myself).It was exciting too, to be lined up in my St Finbarrs cc gear at the other side of the world. Short and fast is all I can say with plenty tight corners! I think I had the luck of the Irish that night because I managed to stay with the bunch until the finishing sprint. A move was made at the right hand side of the field so most of the riders moved in that direction...which left me, sitting on the left with a clear view of the finish line! Heart exploding and lungs telling me to stop I crossed the finish line in 5<sup>th</sup>!! Marina Duvnjak was the clear winner with a great sprint finish. Needless to say a few celebratory Mohijtos were had ☺



**Marina Duvnjak the clear winner, me, with my head down, sprinting for my life on the right hand side of the photo.**

With renewed confidence I entered two stage races, the Bey May Women's Tour and the Women's Tour of Wellington.

The Bev May is a great race, except that it means you have to race all of St Valentine Weekend! It is fantastic though, it caters for all types of female cyclists having A, B, C and Junior racing. The main organizer is Bev May, a cyclist herself, better known to all riders as Aunty Ducky...basically she is the Valerie Considine of women's cycling in New Zealand...except much older! She, like Valerie (I'll get the money off ya when I get home for all these compliment Valerie!) is truly great person who puts huge effort into promoting and encouraging all women's of all standards to race.

All event details, results and photos can be seen on this link: [www.morrinsvillewheelers.org.nz](http://www.morrinsvillewheelers.org.nz).

Stage 1 was a 21km time trial; this went very well for me and put me in 4<sup>th</sup> position in the B grade. For stage 2, 3 and 4 A and B grades raced together.

Stage 2(75 km) and stage 3(90 km) I spent just hanging in there! I got dropped on every KOM and only for the bunch being tactical and watching each other to see who'd make a move I'd a never got back on. This meant coming into the final stage I was lying in 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the B grade.

I was lucky gone hard in the TT! I normally like criterium races so going into stage 4 I was a bit more relaxed than stages 3 and 4. This criterium was wicked though, 30 min+2 laps of tearing around corners. My average rate was 173 and hit 186 on numerous occasions. Stubbornness kept me in the bunch and once again with my heart and lungs left 100m before the finish line I managed to finish in the bunch and collected all lost body parts on the cool down lap!



**Bev May, Fiona Meade (3<sup>rd</sup>), Ashleigh Neave (1<sup>st</sup>), Nicky Bowden (2<sup>nd</sup>)**

This brings me to the Womens Tour of Wellington, a 2.2 UCI race. (<http://www.cycletournz.com/Default.aspx?alias=www.cycletournz.com/womenstour>) Now, I definitely didn't think too much about this when I entered, thought I'd enter to see what it would be like to race against the top riders on this side of the world. It probably would have been a good idea to look at the stage courses before entering, but that would have been no fun ;-), and I probably wouldn't have entered if I had, I would have been too scared!

For this race all riders were in teams and if you were not already in a team you were placed with other individual entrants into a team of 5 and for the cheapskate backpacking cyclist from Ireland it meant some free gear (thanks Jorge!) We were unlucky that 2 of our team riders pulled out, but too be honest there was no team tactics for us it was just going to be a fight for survival! As it turned out one of the other riders is an Irish girl who has been living in Melbourne for the last 12 years, Fiona Spargo. Claire Vlahopoulos also from Australia was the 3<sup>rd</sup> musketeer in "team R&R".

Stage one and 2, like the Bev May for me were spent hanging on to the back on the bunch and if there chasing to get back on to it! Going in to the race I expected it to be like racing in a men's A/B race at home. Memories of a bad decision to enter the Westport 2 day stage race at home last year were at the front of my mind, where I got dropped after 7 miles and never saw the bunch again for the rest of the day! But, likr the Bev May the top riders were watching each other closely, and I think, saving energy for the brutal stage 3 of climbing that lay ahead. For this reason, each time I got dropped I managed to get back on and finished in the bunch both days. Stage 3 was a mammoth stage with over 1000m of climbing! This I have to say was the best day of racing. The first 60km were quiet (from what I could tell hanging on to the back, again!)

but 5 riders got away at the 60km mark, team R&R's Fiona Spargo in the mix. They stayed away for the rest of the day which gave Fiona Spargo a fantastic 6<sup>th</sup> place finish, putting her 6<sup>th</sup> overall on the GC. Fiona is a fantastic climber, the only girl I'd talked to who was actually looking forward to the 11km hill top finish of stage 3! Well done Fiona. This Fiona, finished 17 minutes behind the winner, delighted to have made the cut off time and to have finished the 3 stages.

Rochelle Gilmore of the Australian National team took 1<sup>st</sup> in both stages 1 and 2 and Amber Halliday of MB Cycles Team – Australia taking the win on stage 3, placing her in 1<sup>st</sup> overall on GC.

Photos of this tour can be seen on the below link

[http://www.silverimage.co.nz/index.php?pr=Womens\\_Tour\\_2009](http://www.silverimage.co.nz/index.php?pr=Womens_Tour_2009)

With one day of rest there was one final race, a 1.1 UCI criterium in Masterton town. 14 laps of an 8.km lap...plenty of practice at cornering and sprinting! I have to say I loved this race. I felt much stronger and managed to make it to the front of the bunch (just once!) to chase back a break; I sank back into the bunch again after that hoping to save energy for the final sprint! Again this went to a sprint finish, with Chloe Hosking (AUS) Mercedes Benz Team taking the win with second going to Rochelle Gilmore (AUS) Australia National Team. Me, I finished a very happy 26<sup>th</sup> in the middle of the bunch.

All in all I have to say the racing, and cycling in general over here is great. There are just so many cyclists out on the road, it amazes me every time. The sportive's are excellent beautiful scenery and fantastic spot prizes, you'd nearly enter just to be in with a chance to win! And the racing, it's just a great opportunity to experience racing with some top class athletes and to have so many women racing...and of course I can count on one hand the number of times I've cycled in the rain...a very definite bonus from the sounds of a terrible winter, weather wise, at home.

Best of luck to all taking part in the first round of the National league this weekend. I'll be checking out the website for the updates!

Fiona Meade

