

# Dean Johnson – Mountain to Mountain, Wanaka

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Website: <http://www.m2mwanaka.com/>

It's all Sean's fault. I bumped into Sean Every at the Arawa Canoe Club and he mentioned this race he had in mind. "Sounds good" said I and that was about the extent of the decision-making process.

The aptly named Mountain to Mountain race is a six stage event, starting at the top of Treble Cone ski field and finishing at the top of the Snow Park in the Cardrona Valley. The various legs are:

1. Ski down Treble Cone (4km)
2. Mountain bike down the access road and up the Matukituki valley (16km)
3. Kayak down the Matukituki River (13km)
4. Run off-road to Glendhu Bay (8km)
5. Road ride into Wanaka and up Cardrona Valley (35km)
6. Mountain bike up the Snow Park access road (13km)

But there was one small problem. I can't ski. A knee reconstruction a couple of years ago means I can't handle the lateral movement involved in skiing. The solution arrived in the form of my mate, Lawrence. He is an excellent skier, loves mountain biking and hates, passionately, everything else. This was an ideal opportunity for him to take part in his first ever multisport event. So Lawrence did stages 1,2 and 6 (ski, mtb down, mtb up – I had to give him SOME uphill) and I did stages 2,3 and 4 (paddle, run, road ride).

Despite a well dodgy forecast, the weather was just about perfect on the day. The race started at 11:00 a.m. and Lawrence came screaming into the bike/paddle transition at 11:39. Not a bad start. Now, I had a plan. My plan was to improve my race day nutrition beyond the carbo gel / rehydration fluid I usually get by on. The idea (my Complete Performance coach's idea) was to get something a bit more solid down me during the race. So there were jet planes in the pocket of my pfd and I had some pikelets as well. I say had some pikelets because I had them with me in Christchurch – and, because I have a memory like a sieve, that's where they stayed! So it was jet planes. I really resent stopping paddling even long enough to grab something quickly and stick it in my mouth. So I didn't even do the jet plane thing. Oops.

Despite my miserable failure at improving my nutrition, I had a great paddle. My kayak is an Eclipse 5.7. I got passed early on by a UFO and an Evolution. No disgrace in that, I guess. As it turned out, they were the only boats that got by me. I managed to knock off quite a number including 4 Evolutions! Pretty happy with that.

The river was mostly one braid and very straightforward. The biggest challenge was the get-out point which was at a boat ramp. There were trees and a steep bank either side, so nowhere else to go. Now, the thing with boat ramps is the water gets deep quickly. No nice shallow area to in which to exit your kayak. The ramp was about 4 metres wide and I arrived at the same time as 5 other kayaks, so all I could do was nose in at right angles to the bank and tip sideways out of the boat. Not very graceful and very wet, but hey, it was a warm day.

Next came a very stiff 8 km run. Hilly and muddy. Really muddy. I'm talking suck-your-shoes-off muddy. And did I mention the hills? I managed to get a couple of jet planes down during the run – hey, I was improving! Then I was onto the road bike for an undulating (read "hilly") ride into Wanaka and up the Cardrona Valley. I stopped enjoying the race after about 20 km on the bike and the last 15 km were just hard work. I guess that's probably how it should be. I must have been tired because a guy sat on my wheel for the last 20 minutes. On a mountain bike. I'm embarrassed to say he even took a couple of turns in front.

2 hours 55 minutes after starting the paddle I gratefully handed over to Lawrence for his long slow slog up the access road on the Mountain Bike. I had a somewhat easier trip up in the car.

This is a great event. The scenery, organisation and weather were all just right. I'm secretly glad I can't ski or I would feel obliged to go back next year and do the whole thing.

Dean Johnson.