

Recently I competed at the biggest event of the year: UCI Mountain Bike World Championships held in Cairns, Australia. I was lucky enough to be selected to compete not only in the Junior Women's race but the Team Relay too. It was an honour to be able to wear the New Zealand fern on my back and I did my best to make New Zealand proud. Arriving in Cairns the conditions were hot, dry and dusty with an average temperature of 29° with 70-80% humidity.



In the team relay I was set out to be the 3rd rider of the team. I definitely felt the pressure as Sam Gaze and Eden Cruise set the pace before me coming in 1st and then 3rd. I came in 11th after my lap but happy with how I went considering I had 2016 World Champion Annika Langvad in front of me and Pauline Ferrand-Prevot behind me. I did approximately a 15 ½ minute lap time. Being the first time New Zealand has competed in the MTB World Champs team relay in approx 8 years it was awesome to be apart of it and have New Zealand come in 8th place. It was a privilege to be apart of the team relay and I hope to be apart of it again.



Next up was the big race for me. With my lucky number 4 on my back and 3rd called up on the start line I knew that was the moment where all I could do was try my best. So that's what I did. With a not so good start just about crashing and just getting swamped in general I came into the single track with approximately 25 riders in front of me. The first lap out of 4 was a mission just getting past people where I could gain up until I sat in about 19th place. Doing all the A-lines except Rodeo drop because it was too dusty I was pretty consistent through the rest of the laps and didn't make any mistakes. That being said I know what I need to work on and where I made up time on other riders. I came into the finish line in 19th place after having battles all through the race with USA girls and was happy it was over as I did my best.



Next year is going to be a big step up for me as I go into U23 and start at the back of the grid. However I am ready to work my way up the ranks and do my best on the World Cup stage and do New Zealand proud.



Big thanks to all my sponsors and especially Pohutukawa Coast Bike Club for all the support and helping me achieve my dreams as well as helping to cover costs.

Photo credit to Barking Cat Photography and Cameron Mackenzie.

- *Jessica Manchester*