

Chance to mix it with world's best

Southland's BMX stars have worked hard, raised funds and now they're off to the world champs in Auckland.

BMX
Scott Eade

Southland's BMX elite will be in for the ride of their lives this month when they rub shoulders with the world's best BMX riders.

A 15-strong Southland contingent will take part in the UCI BMX World Championships, to be held at Auckland's Vector Arena, from July 24-28.

Apart from Summer Lucas, who had previously competed at the 2009 World Championships in Adelaide, and her father Joe, who competed at the 2003 event in Perth, the event will be the first time the Southland contingent get to wear the silver fern.

Southland BMX Club president Ginge Burnett said the event would be something the south-erners would savour for the rest of their lives.

"For most of them, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Holding the event in Auckland meant family members would be on hand to watch the youngsters represent New Zealand.

This is the first time New Zealand has hosted the World Championships.

BMX is regarded as one of the quickest-growing sports in the world after gaining Olympic status in 2008.

As the host country, New Zealand can field 32 riders in each junior age group.

Other countries are allowed to enter 16 riders in each junior category.

The age of competitors at the championships will range from 5 to 75 years of age.

The championships would feature the likes of 2012 Olympic silver medallist Sarah Walker, and

THE RIDERS

Southland Riders at the UCI BMX World Championships in Auckland July 24-28:

9 years boys class: Jake Lawrence,
10 years girls class: Ruby Laidlaw,
10 years boys class: Ben Burnett,
Seth Brown,
11 years girls class: Shakira Mirfin,
11 years boys class: Conor Douglas,
12 years and under cruiser class:
Jacob Crooks,

13 years boys class: Josh Burnett,
14 years boys class: Ryan Grantham,
Callum Holloway,
16 years girls class: Summer Lucas,
16 years boys class: Harlam Heydon,
17-plus years girls 20-inch wheel
class: Nardia McLachlan,
17-24 years boys cruiser class: Josef
Winders,
30-plus years men 20-inch wheel
class: Joe Lucas.

would involve 1800 age-group competitors and their families, along with over 2000 of the world's best BMX riders.

Southland BMX coach Ted Lucas, who has had a long-running association with the sport, said the buildup to the event had involved long hours of speed, jump and downhill training.

Riders will race inside Vector Arena on a purpose-built dirt track.

Usually a track is 400m in

length. However, due to being in an indoor arena, the course will only be 300m long.

This means the start will become more crucial than usual for riders.

"Most races are won at the first corner," Lucas said.

With the starting section of the track in Auckland being a lot steeper than what the Southland riders trained on at Elizabeth Park in Invercargill, Lucas decided to improvise and gave them

a taste of just how steep the start would be.

"We took them down to Bluff to a farmer's house... it was sloped like a cliff," he said.

Mastering the art of being able to pedal quickly while riding down a steep slope was important to gaining an advantage on your rivals, he said.

Mental skill was another aspect of the sport the long-serving coach had tried to instil into his riders.

"I use visualisation and relaxation," Lucas said.

With races over in a matter of seconds, having a clear mind was important to having a good start to the race.

Outside of training for the event, the youngsters had been kept busy with plenty of fundraising activities to make sure they get to Auckland.

Selling scratchy boards and cheese rolls were just some of the fundraising endeavours the riders had undertaken to ensure they would get to compete on the world stage.



Getting ready: Southland BMX rider Ryan Grantham, 13, training with other Southland-based members of the New Zealand team at World Gym in Invercargill. Photo: NICOLE GOURLEY 628175990