



Mountain Biking

The year started optimistically with Covid no longer an impact on our events and twenty-five students attending the 2023 muster, our first official ride for newcomers and their parents.

The Term One focus was good, with the North Island tournament at Rotorua something to aim for. Mid-week training sessions were held at Riverhead, and the school van and bike trailer was full most weeks. Most Sundays saw over twenty students training in Grammar colours, and about ten parents riding to help.

As usual, large numbers at training meant we split into at least three or four groups on our Sunday morning rides. These training sessions could not happen if not for parent riders' help. This was especially important this year as we were unable to employ a coach to push our fittest, fastest and most experienced riders.

Group rides took place every Sunday at various venues such as Riverhead Forest, Hunua Regional Park, Waitawa Regional Park, Totara Park, Maraetai Forest, and Woodhill Forest. We focused on building skills, increasing fitness, and playing on bikes as the best ways to improve.

The Cycling New Zealand Schools' North Island Championships were held in Rotorua during the April School Holidays. Eleven Mountain Bikers represented Grammar in four different events. It was a great experience for all involved, especially as there was little in the way of Enduro and Downhill competitions in which Auckland schools could participate.

On Friday, the Downhill Race and the upper sections of the course proved quite testing due to still being wet and slippery. We had six riders entered, but three were injured after the practice runs and could not compete in the final race run. Our best results were William Altoft finishing 16th and Flynn Rhodes-McRae 27th in the U20 category, and Vinnie Flaws finishing 32nd in the U17 race.

On Saturday morning, the Cross Country races took place, which included long hill climb sections and some steep and technical down trails. Tommy Mollison in the U16, doing 21km, chased hard in a sprint finish to place 4th, one second behind 3rd place. Divan Ferreira in the U15 category finished a very creditable 9th in his three laps of 7km.

In the afternoon was the Cross Country Relay Team race, in which teams of three attempted to complete as many laps of a 2km course as possible in sixty minutes. The U16 proved to be an exciting race, with a closely fought battle between 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. The Grammar Team of Mollison, Ferreira and Harrison Daley, completed ten laps to finish 4th. They completed the same number of laps as 2nd and 3rd place, but in the end, finished 8 seconds behind 3rd place in the one hour race.

On Saturday was the Enduro Event, includ-



Downhill practice at North Islands, Rotorua



Captain Flynn Rhode-Macrae, 1st U20 Auckland Downhill Champs



ing three stages, with an exhausting climb between the end of 'Hot Cross Buns', up 'Direct Road', and 'Frontal Lobotomy', to get to 'Eagle vs Shark'. There were over 360 competitors. Our best results were Altoft 21st and Rhodes-McRae 23rd in the U20, and Flaws and Tom Rodger 19th and 24th respectively in the U17 race.

Auckland Schools Mountain Bikers had their 2023 Enduro Race Championships in late April at Maraetai, hosted by Pohutukawa Coast Mountain Bike Club. There was a four and six stage trail option available, ranging from grade two to grade four. Grammar achieved some pleasing results in a number of age groups.

In the Four Stage Race, George Elrick placed 1st in the Year 13 age group; Zach Clark was 3rd in the Year Eleven to Twelve age group, and William White was 4th in the Year Nine to Ten age group, only 25 seconds behind the leader across the four stages.

In the Six Stage Race, which included significantly more climbing and harder trails, Altoft placed 8th and Flaws placed 11th in the Year Eleven to Twelve age group.

Some of our riders competed in Auckland Downhill (AKDH) Club Schools race at Dome Valley in September. The race had been scheduled in Term One but Dome Valley suffered a lot of damage in the storm and floods that occurred in late January. In very slippery conditions prior to the senior examinations, we had a pleasing number of top ten finishes. In the Year Nine age group, White finished 9th and Matthew Caird, 10th. In the Year Eleven group, Flaws finished 5th. In the Year Twelve category, Altoft finished 2nd. In the Year Thirteen group, Rhodes Macrae finished an impressive 1st.

The 2023 Mons Royale Auckland Schools Mountain Bike Cross Country Championships was a five-race series, over Terms One to Three. Grammar attendance at some of the Auckland Schools Mountain Biking races was disappointing, but at the last race of the season, we were proud that nineteen riders competed in Grammar colours, some doing their first ever race.

Nearly 200 riders participated in Race 1, held on 12th March at Riverhead Forest, always a challenge with steep pinch climbs and vertiginous descents, requiring all the more technical skill where recent rain had rendered some tracks thick with mud.

Our best results were: White 3rd in the U14 category, Ferreira 4th in U15, Mollison 1st in U16, and Hamish Bolland 2nd in U20.

Race 2 was held at Hunua Regional Park in early May amidst bad weather. Hunua is one of the more difficult courses riders face in the series, with 7km laps and narrow single track, technical roll downs, and rocky stream crossings. Slippery tree roots, pinch climbs, and sections through rain sodden muddy paddocks hamper the course, rendering it all the more exhausting.

The weather was kinder throughout the day, and over 200 riders braved the conditions, but the ground was very wet. Riders finished caked in as much mud as their bikes.

Grammar had some pleasing results with many riders placing in the top ten of their age group. White placed 8th in U14, and Sam Mac-



Vice-captain Hamish Bolland at Waitawa



Moritz (German exchange student) and Zayn - 1st ever race, Woodhill



donald 9th. In U15, Ferreira finished 5th. In U16, Mollison finished 1st, 90 seconds ahead of 2nd place, after three laps of 7km. In U20, Bolland finished 3rd over his 21km.

Race 3 was held at Totara Park. The wet winter meant conditions were muddy, tacky, and exhausting on the climbs. Grammar saw respectable race numbers amongst its junior entrants. In U14, White placed 4th. Daniel Taylor was 7th in U15. In U16, Mollison finished 1st, and in U20 Bolland finished 4th and Altoft 5th.

Race 4 was held at Waitawa Regional Park. By this stage, weather had improved with fine conditions on the day, with a few muddy areas under the trees and on the climbs. The turnout by Grammar was low, and only six riders raced due to a number of Covid and flu cases amongst the Grammar's mountain bikers. White placed 8th in U14 while Bolland finished 4th and Altoft 6th in U20.

Race 5, the final in the Auckland Cross Country Mountain Biking Championships Series, was held at Woodhill Forest. For the juniors, the day started with a couple of heavy showers that turned some climbs into muddy games of Snakes and Ladders. By the time the seniors were beginning, the course had dried to become hard and fast. In this final, Grammar had good numbers racing in each age group, and it was pleasing to see some of our newer riders enter their first race.

Our best results were: Mollison 1st in U16 and Flaws 5th in U17. In U20, Bolland placed 5th, Rhodes Macrae 6th, Altoft 7th and Elrick 8th.

This final race was the deciding race for the series, with the best four results from five races totalled to decide the Auckland Champions for 2023. Our best results were: in U14, White placed 5th; in U16, Mollison was 1st. In U20, Bolland finished 3rd to secure Bronze, and Altoft placed 5th.

Grammar finished a narrow second overall in the Best Male School category. If we had more senior riders in Race 3, we may have won.

Grammar entered five teams of three riders in the Auckland XCR Relay Champs, held after Race 1 at Riverhead in March. Teams of three aim to do as many laps of a short technical course in 60 minutes. In the U20 Male category, the Grammar U20 A Team consisting of Altoft, Bolland and Rhodes Macrae placed 1st with ten laps completed in the fastest time. In the U16 Male category, Grammar teams placed outside the top five. However, the U16 A team had been running 2nd before losing their number plate, and finished two laps down.

Four Grammar Mountain Bikers travelled to Blenheim at the end of the October school holidays to compete in the Cycling New Zealand Schools' Mountain Biking National Championships. There were four events: a Cross Coun-

try race, a Cross Country Relay Teams race, a Downhill race and an Enduro race. The weather was fine, and the courses were technical. Our young riders enjoyed the experience and all were impressed by their confidence and ability to complete even the most technical courses safely. Grammar's best results were in the Cross Country and Relay events.

The Cross Country race was run at Wither Hills on a newly prepared national course. It was one of the most challenging and technical courses ever used for a schools' cross-country event, and included long hill climb sections, rock gardens, drops and 'doubles' (jumps). Mollison rode an outstanding race to claim Silver in the U16 category. In the XCR (Relay) Event, the team of Mollison; White; and Daley finished a creditable 4th in New Zealand in the U16 Male grade.

As we conclude the year, we would like to thank the following parents for their regular participation and contribution to these rides: Mr D Rhodes, Mr B Altoft, Mr B Daley, Mr G Mollison, Mr J White, and Mr D Ferreira. Special mention is due to Mr and Mrs J and A Le Roux, Mrs D Macrae and to the many other parents who volunteered to assist these three parents' efforts to keep everyone fed and refreshed at race events.

Mr J Hasler, Teacher in Charge