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Riders geared up for scenic race

By JACOB PAGE - The Timaru Herald Last updated 05:00 30/01/2010

The X Scenic mountainbike race is set to be a hotly contested opening round for the South Canterbury Mountainbike Cup at Centennial Park tomorrow.

More than 60 riders have already signed up to take part in the event, which has been split in to three sections according to skill level.

Most interest will centre on the elite category, which has drawn a quality field of both Canterbury and South Canterbury riders to ride a 13 kilometre course for three laps, which includes edgy trails, steep climbs and technical prowess.

Christchurch-based Anton Cooper may prove to be the rider to beat. The 15-year-old is the under-17 Australian national champion – he won the title last weekend.

Event organiser Chris Thomas said Cooper would have the added advantage of being familiar with the Centennial Park course.

"Cooper is quite familiar with the Centennial Park course, having been a member of the winning team in both the 2008 and 2009 Timaru 12 hour race also held in [Centennial Park]."

Thomas said with the course being a tight one, he expected an interesting first lap, as riders jostled for position.

"I think the pace in the first lap will be absolutely flat-out with the super quick youngsters wanting to get a lead established so they have some clear riding in front of them."

South Canterbury riders should also feature prominently with Craig Atwill, Thomas Prestidge and Simon Coventry all expected to push Cooper hard, along with a strong group of Canterbury riders coming down for the event.

The women's race is headlined by recent South Island Cup winner Emma Prestidge, who will be looking for a victory on her home track.

Riders will accumulate points from the X Scenic event to go towards the further three rounds of the South Canterbury Mountainbike Cup.

The second round will be held at Lake Opuha on February 14.

Racing starts at 11am, with entries for all grades still open on the day for all three classes, which include a 10km challenge race and a 20km challenge race.

Spectators are welcome at the event, which will close the park to the general public for the day, while Centennial Park Rd will be closed from Claremont Rd to the lake carpark.