

# Jess out to beat the boys in Hotrock

by Antony Stewart

antony.stewart@townsvillebulletin.com.au

NO one knows better than Jess Douglas how much men "hate losing to a girl".

Over the years she's made a pastime of it and tomorrow the world champion mountain bike rider plans on inflicting more embarrassment on the blokes when she competes in the Townsville Rockwheelers 8 Hour Hotrock event.

"The guys always want to beat the girls, so I always have that in the back of my head," Douglas said with a laugh.

"If I can win the women's - that's great, fantastic - but then it's 'how many men can I beat?'"

"It's all in good fun, though, it's not like there are sheep stations riding on it.

"But the sport is very male dominated and I love showing other girls that you can go out there from day one as a beginner and that you can turn yourself into a pro."

Douglas won the world women's 24-hour title last year, fulfilling her dream before retiring from the gruelling marathon version of the sport. But the competitive spirit still burns brightly in the 38-year-old.

While eight hours may seem like a comparative walk in the park next to 24 hours, Douglas was far from taking it lightly.

"Mentally it's easier to cope with, but it is a tough race and it doesn't matter how fast or slow you go, you're still out there and you've still got to concentrate, you've got to eat and drink," the Victorian said.

"It still hurts ... but it's great fun and an eight-hour enduro during the day is just a great social experience."

She is set to join about 260 riders, from individuals to teams, in the gruelling ride at Lake Ross Park, continuing the event's growing reputation on the Australian mountain bike calendar.

But organiser Haydn Tilley said Douglas's entry was the biggest coup in the Hotrock's history.

"For us it's huge ... and she's come up to do some skills clinics as well," he said.

"Townsville's got some amazing mountain bike tracks ... and it's becoming very well known now Australia-wide ... and (Douglas and husband Norm) had heard about our tracks and thought they'd come and have a look."

While Tilley reckons Douglas will be tough to beat, he said riders such as Jason Vaughan and Greg Longson would give her a run for her money, while last year's female winner Abby McLennan also couldn't be discounted.

Racing starts at 7.30am.



**SHE'S A CHAMP:** Jess Douglas tunes up for tomorrow's big event at Lake Ross Park Photo: EVAN MORGAN