

Below: Erik posing with Ariane, who'd secured the MTN National series title with a victory at Hilton, and Joggie Prinsloo. Right: Erik's RECM teammate Nico Bell digging deep in pursuit of Darren Lill.



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MTN Hilton through the windscreen and lenses of Zoon Cronje

The small town of Hilton, a few kilometres north and separated by a long hill – perfect for intervals – from Pietermaritzburg, had been home to the Kleinhans family for six weeks, so the MTN National Series Hilton race was almost like a home race for Ariane. But for Erik, the holes drilled through his clavicle, attaching his new artificial ligaments, meant that he would be riding shotgun with the MTN National Series ace photographer Zoon Cronje rather than racing.

Zoon Cronje is well known for his action shots of the MTN Series and many more adventure sport events, but for anyone who has ever spent a day in his beloved Mitsubishi Pajero while covering an event, his mad driving skills and ability to be “in” the thick of the racing is kind of legendary!

I’ve always loved cycling, not just riding and racing, but also to watch and support. I never missed a race that was broadcasted on the tellie. I taped them all and watched them over and over, only chased away when interfering with my mother’s Ego! or my father’s SABC News time. So due to this unfortunate injury, it gave me a good opportunity to follow the racing and support the riders thanks to Zoon making space for me in his 4x4!

Just before the start-gun fired, we had to make a run for the Pajero to make sure we are in front of the bunch. That did not work out all too well as 300-meters further we were blocked by a gate leading out of the school and unfortunately had to wait for the full elite bunch to go past, I had a bad feeling of what was going to happen next, a quick U-turn saw us racing through the schoolyard, luckily it was a Sunday or we would surely have seen the schoolboys fall like dominoes!

Not only was I impressed by the height gained over the speedbumps, but also by Zoon’s navigational skills. I thought the day was lost, but then again, by that time I was already a bit concussed, as we met the front runners on the next rocky climb. Trailing them down the descent that followed, we kept a bit of distance when it got really steep, just in case a rider crashed in front of us. Zoon explained that on those loose, rocky downhills there is no chance for the Pajero to stop quickly except by going down the cliff a few meters to our left.

We followed the riders, either right behind or alongside through the bushes and grass next to the road. Singletrack sections forced us to race around which got us ahead of the bunch so we can see the suffering in their faces. I urged Zoon on to make more dust for them to eat. I guess that was me being slightly jealous of not being able to race! But sadly, very politely, he tried to keep that to a minimum.

There was also some calm on the day. We could camp out at the highest point of the race, and take the opportunity to send out some tweets, enjoy the view and watch the riders coming past. In a forest singletrack section, I tried to judge which riders snaked through the trails the fastest, while Zoon gave it his all sprinting behind the riders



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with the flycam to snap some of his iconic action shots. I bet he would have preferred an uphill section where the riders go a bit slower, but the best shots are hardly ever in easy to shoot places!

The racing got tense towards the end of the race with my RECM teammate, Nico Bell, fighting for the win against Darren Lill (Cannondale/Blend) and Gawie Combrinck (EAI). It was great to be so close to the riders, you could just sense the desire in all three of them to claim one of the eight National Marathons wins available in 2014. We left the leaders with just a small climb to go so the film crew could capture the finish line shots. After 115km of tough racing it was Darren who crossed the line a hand full of seconds ahead of Nico.

What impressed me most however is that while all this driving and bundu-bashing was going on - and Joggie Prinsloo and I were just holding on for dear life, sometimes even hanging onto each other on the back-seat – Zoon managed to get his photos, and great photos at that. Equally impressively his right hand man, Arthur, managed to tweet race

updates and film steady footage for the race highlights videos.

With my backstage-pass (read: injury enforced time off the bike) I’ve seen the work done by our RECM staff at the races and now I’ve also experienced how the story of each race gets out there. It gave me a new perspective and I can only express my gratitude to everyone involved who keep this great wheel of mountainbiking turning so smoothly in SA! 📷



RECM se Erik Kleinhans is een van Suid-Afrika se gewildste bergfietsjaers. Hy bet sy vrou, Switserse marathontkampioen, Ariane, diep in die

Kammanassieberge op die 2010 Cape Pioneer Trek ontmoet. Hy het vanjaar die Meerendal-Songo-Specialized span van Christoph Sauser en František Raboň in die Cape Epic ondersteun saam met Nico Bell.

Volg hom op Twitter by @kleinhansmuesli of besoek sy weberf: www.kleinhansmuesli.com.