



**READY TO GO:** Russell Watts has raced in numerous events here and abroad as a para-triathlete. Saturday will be his first Ironman New Zealand.

0303161russellwatts

**Caroline Sowerby**

**R**ussell Watts' first response when his wife Helena told him she'd won free entry to the 2016 Kellogg's Nutri-Grain Ironman New Zealand was, "that was the booby prize!" However he later decided that he actually had the booby prize — because he felt he should join his wife and enter the event, but had to pay himself. Helena is the practice manager at Taupō Medical Centre and had volunteered in the Ironman medical tent for the past two years. Despite seeing various injuries and casualties coming for help she wasn't put off from entering her name into the draw at the volunteers' dinner, held each year after Ironman New Zealand. She was amazed when her name was actually called, but determined she would not back out. Helena had not been active in sport since 2012 as a result of knee, elbow and shoulder injuries from a tramping accident. She was due to have shoulder surgery later in 2015 but managed to fast track it to April to give her an extra four weeks of training. "When I spoke to the surgeon about my Ironman entry and whether it would affect my shoulder surgery he said it wouldn't and he offered to give me the name of a good psychiatrist as he thought I was mad to be taking part," says Helena. Being competitive by nature, and confident that she could complete the Ironman if she really worked at it, Helena got straight into spin cycle classes and progressed from there under the guidance of coach Mike Bush of



# Side by side

Multisport Motivation, who she praises for his perseverance and hard work. She admits that on her first road bike hill, up the Napier-Taupō Road, she wanted to kill Mike for making her do it and was wondering how on earth she would ever be able to bike 180km. How things have changed. "I guess you know you've got the bug when you think of a 10km run as a training run or you knock off 15km and think nothing of it," says Helena. Different fitness levels and time commitments meant that Helena and Russell rarely trained together. Helena works full time so fitted her training in with early morning starts, evenings after work and at the weekends. In the last few weeks before the event she's also been taking a half day off work each week to fit in her big runs. Russell is a former international para-triathlete who keeps fit to help fight his

multiple sclerosis. He already had a good level of fitness but revamped his training to suit Ironman; changing from sprint to endurance and long distance. He trained during week days and also at weekends, so one of the biggest challenges the couple faced was not being able to do anything together at the weekend because of their commitment to training. The couple, who both turn 50 this year, speak highly of Tri-Sport Taupō and Russell recommends that anyone thinking of entering Ironman next year joins the triathlon club. It gives members access to experienced triathletes who will encourage them, answer their questions and be able to give good advice because they've been there themselves. Both Ironman entrants feel confident they've put the hard yards in to complete the event. "For me, Ironman is an event about testing

**ROAD TO SUCCESS:** Ironman volunteer Helena Watts has spent the past year training to ensure she completes this Saturday's Ironman event.

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the body and getting the personal satisfaction of successfully completing the Ironman challenge," says Russell. "Other events I've done have been about being faster than everyone else. When training and preparing for Ironman a key thing is to try and avoid injury. It's quite a balancing act to do this and not put yourself into an injury and/or burnout situation. You need to know your body, what it can do and how far it can be pushed." Helena's shoulder problems have recurred at times during her training but she's worked around them. A month before taking part in the Ironman 70.3 last December Helena slipped down the stairs at home and couldn't do any further swimming in the four week lead-up to avoid any further shoulder injury. She's since completed all the distances required in Ironman, but never all in one go. "I think I will come in around 10 to 10.30pm," Helena says. "I'm not going to beat myself up though if I don't as I have never put all the disciplines together. I'm very confident I'll finish before midnight." Several family members will be volunteering at Ironman this year and cheering them on. Their son Nathan is flying in from Brisbane to help out and their daughter Nicole will also be volunteering, along with Helena's brother and sister-in-law. Helena is looking forward to things getting back to normal after the event and intends to stay active. She has lost 10kg and two dress sizes and credits all the spin classes and bike riding for fixing her knee problem. She and Russell are also looking at possibly holding joint 50th birthdays and hope there will be plenty of good reasons to celebrate after this year's Ironman New Zealand.