

# ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA50 - Matthew Carroll

Podium, dorm bed and a 9 day lead up

## Pre-Race

Nine days before the UTA50 I hadn't worn my trail shoes or hit decent elevation for 2 months. The Rotorua Marathon was my target race for early May, in which I finished 6th with an 11 minute PB. 2 days post marathon, I went for a jog and with legs feeling fresh, the idea popped into my head, UTA50. Within 5 days I had my entry, flights, a dorm bed, some serious determination and a solid 15km trail run under my belt.

I know this course fairly well having run the route 3 times in 2014. A goal time of 5hrs was realistic, so I had a look at sub 5hrs splits from 2015. Fuel plan of 8 gels, 2 fizz tabs, 4 salt tablets, 2 no doze and 2 Panadol extra would get me through it.

## Start to Fairmont Resort

As expected, wave one got moving quickly, Vlad and Mark set off in front at pace. I hit the top of the Giant Stairway in 7th and had a reasonable decent into Leura Forest. At this point I had made my way into 5th, approaching the first water stop at The Fairmont.

On approach into the Fairmont, the manual timing paddle failed which resulted in a 2 minute wait allowing runners up to 10th place to catch up. A few of the lads were getting restless so the call was made to all run on without scanning chips. We all flew into the water point, my transition was a touch slow leaving the CP in 10th.

## Fairmont Resort to CP501

The race was now on to remain in the top 10. I had to stay absolutely focused on my race plan, I wasn't to push until Kedumba as I knew the only prep I had was road. I spent the next hour coasting along between 6th and 8th place feeling comfortable.

Around the 25k mark, Vlad pulled off to the side to let me pass. At this point I knew the race had just begun. I knew I had some good road speed in my legs so once I got within 3k of CP501 and with the podium in reach, I started to open up on the flat and hit the caffeine.

Coming into CP501 I was sitting in 4th focused on a quick transition to keep the pace flowing. Flew in, topped up a soft flask, grabbed two extra gels, 3 cups of fizz and left swiftly.

## CP501 to Finish

Kedumba was my opportunity and I hit it at full pace. Inspired from seeing Brendan Davie's sub 3:00 splits in the UTA22, I aimed for 3:30. I was sitting in 2nd by the time I was 3ks into the decent and grew a lead quickly.

At the bottom of Kedumba the reality of a 13k climb hit, I had burnt a lot on the decent, a run/walk strategy was my only option. Coming into the 41k Emergency Aid station the cow bells rang loud. I topped up my soft flasks and headed off towards Fuber Stairs. As I climbed out of the water station I listened intently for the sound of the bells ringing to assess how far 3rd place was behind me. I never heard the bells ring which gave me an air of hope I can somehow hold onto 2nd.

I hit the Fubers, no water left, nothing in the legs, I was on all fours, clinging to metal wiring, poles, rocks, whatever I could. A hiker gave me his water which provided a small amount of relief. The pain of Fubers was a pain I have never experienced in my racing career it was a brutal 16 minutes. To hit the top and know 2nd was locked in was exhilarating. An attempted run to the line turned into a cramp/shuffle, which I was ok with. I couldn't believe I had the ability to pull this off, underprepared and up against a stacked field, there was no better feeling crossing that line!