

What's On



True blues with Hard Candy to add flavour



RELAY: Runners will swap a sash, or tasuki, as they race around Lake Rotorua tomorrow.

PHOTO/FILE

Runners take a shine to relay

Rotorua Ekiden

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IF you see a bunch of runners in fancy dress tomorrow then you are quite likely to have come across the Rotorua Ekiden.

The event, a team relay around Lake Rotorua, is the only ekiden in New Zealand and this year is under new ownership.

Running Events have taken over and have attracted almost 200 teams, an increase of more than 50 on last year.

"It's going to be a real education," said race director Rob Docherty.

He said Running Events had made a few changes, including everyone receiving a finisher's

medal. "We hope it means more people talk about it," he said.

"There are die-hard runners who don't care about medals but some people might not do another running event all year. We hope this will make them come back for another year."

The distances of each leg have remained the same and the principle of swapping the sash among runners is also in place. There are six legs, from 5km to 9km.

This year there are three teams from the New Zealand Japan Association and Mr Docherty expects the school teams to be the most competitive with the first team expected to finish the 42km event in 2 hours 30 minutes.

"There are some great relay events in New Zealand, such as the Great Lake Relay at Taupo,

What is an ekiden?

■ The term originated in Japan. The first ekiden race was held in 1917, and was run over three days between the old Japanese capital of Kyoto and the modern capital of Tokyo, a distance of 508km, to celebrate the anniversary of moving the capital to Tokyo.

■ As written in Japanese, ekiden combines the characters for station transmit. The original concept of the race dates back to the communication and transportation system in which stations were posted at intervals along the road. In the race, each runner on a team runs the distance from one station to the next, and then hands over a cloth sash, or tasuki, to the next runner.

■ The lengths of ekiden in Japan can vary, as can the number of runners on a team.

but the Rotorua Ekiden should be better because it's more achievable.

"You don't need teams of 12 and a minibus to transport you

around, or to travel through the night. "This race is a good mix of flat sections and hill sections."

Registrations are open until 8pm tonight at the Novotel.

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