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Attention Sports Editors

World champion Shanks tops qualifiers at Oceania Championships

World champion Alison Shanks was in dominant mood to top qualifiers in the individual pursuit on the opening day of the Oceania Track Cycling Championships in Invercargill today.

Shanks (Otago) clocked a slick 3:35.802 in heats and will ride off against Ashburton's Lauren Ellis for the gold medal tonight while Kaytee Boyd (Auckland) will take on Jaime Neilsen (Waikato) for bronze. The quartet were all members of the BikeNZ team at last year's world championships where the New Zealand team won silver in the team pursuit.

Shanks was pleased with her morning effort, wearing the world champion's rainbow jersey in competition for the first time.

"It was pretty satisfying. It's the first time on the bike in competition since the world championships so it was pretty much bang-on what I was looking for," Shanks said.

"Two years ago on this track I rode 3:35 for a personal best. Here I am today on the same track and 3:35 is a satisfying morning ride, so I've come a long way.

"Hopefully I can go faster tonight in the final as I look to build towards the World Cup in Melbourne next week."

The cream also rose to the top in the men's pursuit with Jesse Sergent from Feilding the fastest in the heats in a strong 4:22.424. He will ride off against Te Awamutu's Peter Latham in the final while fellow world championship medal winning squad members Marc Ryan (Timaru) and Sam Bewley (Rotorua) will ride off for the bronze tonight.

"It was pretty good considering I was on the Tour of Southland and it's my first competition since last year," Sergent said.

Earlier Auckland teenager Henrietta Mitchell (Auckland) went under her own national record in qualifying heats of the under-19 women's sprint, clocking 12.075 which was also under the track record at the ILT Velodrome.

The New Zealand team of Simon Van Velthoven, Eddie Dawkins and Andrew Williams will ride off against Australia for gold in the men's team sprint after the kiwis edged out the G Force combination of world champions Sam Webster and Ethan Mitchell along with Adam Stewart in qualifying by 2/10ths of a second.

Tonight is the semifinals and final of the women's sprint, men's team sprint, women's and men's individual pursuit, under-19 keirin and under-19 points race.