

'RITES' FROM PAGE 12

hind more than \$1.5m. The Canterbury Rugby Union will take between \$4 and \$10 from the 52,136 people who come to Lancaster park for the match. So the Ranfurly Shield's significance lies not in any intrinsic value, but in the fact that so many people still place stock in it. Without them it would be just another trophy.

To understand the shield as it relates to Canterbury, you must have some ken of Alex Wyllie. "Grizz" Wyllie is a rugged North Canterbury farmer, but unlike the typically rawboned example of the species, he's built like a bear, with shoulders that would shame Atlas. A specialist No.8 loose forward, he was an All Black, but according to widely accepted rumour, never played for his country again after certain shenanigans on the 1973 tour of Britain.

As captain of the Canterbury rugby team, Grizz became a legend. I recall one game late in his career when he sat out the first half of a game against Wellington because of a nagging injury. Wellington utterly dominated the home side until a Canterbury player's injury allowed Wyllie to come on at half time. The red and blacks stormed back and overhauled a lead of something like 20 points to win well. Miraculous. His motivating methods are unclear but they have probably been at least partially based on the injection of a good degree of the-fear-of-God, especially for any University players in the side. Grizz has reportedly got little time for university students.

After his retirement, it was somehow inevitable that, after a decent period, Alex Wyllie should return as Canterbury coach. He did and he did wonders for the team. In 1982 they did the unprecedented by winning both the shield and the



national championship. Since then his farmer's squint, ruddy hair and, well, grizzled features have become sufficiently enshrined to appear uncredited in a couple of TV commercials. A friend used to turn the TV up blaringly loud every time just to hear Grizz telling his lads about the "Funnamennells."

To understand the significance of the Auckland challenge for the shield you have to bear in mind the historical factors, both recent and not so recent. As they trotted onto the field, the two teams

shared the record for consecutive shield defences (25) and had won more shield games than any other provinces. Two years ago, Canterbury thrashed Auckland at Lancaster Park, and were in turn humbled the next season at Eden Park in Auckland. Last season ended with Auckland as national champions and Canterbury still in possession of the Ranfurly Shield. The stage-setting continued even unto the weekend before the big match, with both sides ditching previous form to win their respective games with authority.

As the (scarcely necessary) newspaper advertisement for the game said: "This should be one of rugby's greatest games ever."

It almost seems too perfect when the blinds are drawn back to reveal a shining Saturday morning, with nary a cloud to blemish the sky. Elsewhere, at this very moment, a noisy red and black parade, the largest yet, is traversing city streets. *The Press* front page is dominated by a picture of a young woman wearing a Canterbury hat and scarf. No doubt the game is all over the radio stations too.

I should make it clear at this point that I was fervently opposed to the proposed All Black tour of South Africa and when the NZRFU announced with finality its intention to carry on with the tour, I swore off attending another rugby game ever. Luckily for them, the foolish old men on the Rugby Union board had their faces, hides and *raison d'être* saved in the nick of time by a couple of smart lawyers who placed an injunction between the team and the departure lounge.

To waltz into South Africa at this time would have gone beyond approval for an evil political system, it would have been the most unspeakable arrogance. It would also have driven several

dozen additional nails into NZ rugby's coffin; probably enough to seal the lid for good. It could also conceivably have seen one or two of our nation's finest come home in coffins of their own.

But reason prevailed and it's safe, for the time being, to immerse oneself in the spectacle of Shield Rugby.

When you go to a major sporting event, actually seeing the game is only one of a number of considerations. After all, if you really want to see the game, you're better off watching it on television. There on the terraces you sway around on tiptoes, blink and miss the action; there are no action replays or close-ups. But live sport, like live anything, is a spectacle, an *experience*. Part of the experience is the preamble ...

That is, the pre-game amble to the ground. On this day we begin a fair amble away, at the United Services Hotel in the Square. The hotel offers accommodation and a fair proportion of the noon-day tipplers are groups of Auckland supporters, distinguished not only by their blue and white accessories, but their vaguely nervous smiles and tendency to clump together. As might be expected of "enemies" plumped down in the midst of rampant provincialism. Of course, all the jibes are friendly ...

The group I'm with don't look like "typical" rugby supporters, but the intent and vision is clear: "This is the one day when you get to be a Bruce — so you've got to make the most of it," as one puts it.

The fervour is more noticeable and more inebriate as the stop off points nearer Lancaster Park are reached. Finally, the last post, the DB Lancaster Park Hotel. I can recall it always seemingly spilling over with people when I went to games as a kid, but now it's beginning to empty out — the attached wholesale outlet is still doing a roaring trade.

Inside the ground the crowd has been "entertained" by the traditional brass and pipe bands and marching girls, as well as Larry the Lamb and his grotesquely large-headed Auckland counterpart. The Canterbury team also takes the unusual step of lining out on both sides of the field and applauding the crowd; a nice gesture. Opting to miss the festivities means we have to stand by the side of the field at ground level. Sporting events aren't what they used to be and out of caution the Canterbury officials squeeze several thousand fewer onto the Embankment than they did in the 1950s.

Visibility isn't the best, especially when policemen form screens by standing together while they watch the game. Regular calls for the "jokers in blue" to sit down are heard. Later the police have to push the crowd back from the line — one youth of about 18 says the wrong thing and is dragged away in a headlock.

The game, as it transpires, is a classic in its way. Auckland has been given the wind in the first half and goes on a rampage, looking to be in complete command when they finish the half up 24-0. That kind of lead should by rights be unassailable, but no decent Canterbury supporter will write off the Canterbury Machine while there's a chance.

And sure enough, Grizz talks to his boys and they go back on and score a try immediately. Auckland scores once more to go to 28 points but the home team gains momentum as the game goes on. They score with five minutes to go, then again two minutes from time and suddenly it's 28-23 and the impossible looks possible. It looks mind-blowingly *probable* as Canterbury attack again and Wayne Smith puts a high kick up into the Auckland in-goal. As the ball goes up, slows and begins its descent 100,000 eyes fix on it, hearts race and even the most reserved in the crowd give voice. But the ball bounces the way of Auckland's John Kirwan rather than his All Black team mate Craig Green and suddenly, anticlimactically, it's all over. Perhaps even a little early ... but that's history.

The crowds pour out and create the usual jams of people v. autos in the surrounding streets. The mood isn't as downcast as you might expect; after all, it was a good game against a good opponent and Canterbury lost in the most honourable manner — thwarted by the final whistle. The point has been made, and there's almost a sense of relief among supporters, they don't have to help defend the shield any more. There's always the challenge in Auckland next year ...

The next morning, Alex Wyllie and the Auckland coach John Hart are interviewed together on TV's *Weekend* show. Everything about the interview seems to emphasise the fact that these are two very different men.

Hart appears in dress jersey and tie, hair neatly groomed; Wyllie has come in in his tracksuit, his ginger thatch wiry and woolly. Hart is a coach who hated training as a player and places little emphasis on it as a coach; Wyllie trains his players hard. Hart is a smooth, smiling talker; Wyllie's brow seems permanently furrowed and his syllables are as pinched as any farmer's.

Wyllie repeats his disgust at the NZRFU's selling of the naming rights of the shield (unprecedented) to NEC computers, making it the NEC Ranfurly Shield; Hart thinks it's part of what rugby has to do to survive. Wyllie again slams the new scrum laws and the lack of live TV coverage for the game; Hart is more moderate. They pay well-deserved compliments to each other and their teams.

In a way, Wyllie seems to symbolise Canterbury solidness; Hart, Auckland go-ahead. They have both been highly effective in their respective ways. Maybe the edge is that Alex Wyllie is just a bit of a legend ...

TT250-Enduro sensation of the century!



An enduro bike like no other, the new TT250 is enough to make mincemeat out of its competitors. So take a good look while you can. Unless you're capable of riding it, you won't be seeing it for dust.

This is the first 4-stroke built like a YZ, and as tough and macho as they come. It has all the advantages of a panther on the hunt — the low-end grunt for tackling the intrepid, and the top-end roar for staying in front of the pack.

Take into account the double overhead cam, 4-valve, twin-carb motor, more useable horsepower, the YZ front and rear suspension which boasts 11 inches of travel, the lightweight rigid single downtube cradle frame chassis



and the plastic tank — and you've got yourself one incredible enduro package.

Sure, it's street legal. But only just. Yamaha's technical basis for producing hot competition off-road bikes can be traced back seventeen years. So it's hardly surprising the Yamaha stable has produced the enduro-bred TT250.

Bred to excel, the TT250 could well prove to be your ultimate wildhorse.

Like all such beasts with a proud heritage, this one costs a little more than the ordinary. Yamaha makes no compromises on quality. And if they did, the TT250 would not exist.

Insist on seeing the TT250 in action soon. However, you can take the exhilaration for granted.

YAMAHA
WILDHORSE
Built like a Thoroughbred

Distributed by Moller Yamaha Limited, Paraiti Road, New Plymouth.