



# Size Does Matter

I had been working as a marine technical officer at the University of Waikato for 23 years. My work took me all over the North Island. I got to see and experience and work in amazing coastal areas, rivers and lakes both above and below the waterline. I loved my work and the interaction with students and scientists. However, times were changing and the nature of the work was not what I initially signed up for.

In 2003 I became a volunteer visitor for Age Concern and started visiting elderly people in the community. I really enjoyed meeting and interacting with the elderly sharing their stories and experiences. I realised I wanted to change my focus and how I made a living. In 2015, while investigating transport options for a friend in a wheelchair I came across the Easy Rider bus, it was for sale. The bus is the only one of its size with a hoist and the ability to transport a large number of wheelchairs and people at the same time. I quickly realised the bus was unique and could be used as a real asset within the community. I saw an opportunity worth pursuing, and in keeping with my desire to change focus I bought the bus without a second thought. At the time I was still working at the University, however a work injury forced me to stay at home for 8 weeks. That gave me time to sit down and decide how to start and tackle what for me was a whole new challenge. I decided to take what was a big step for me, and in late 2016, I retired from the University to concentrate on Easy Rider which already had a few bookings at the time.

A large group of people from New Caledonia were to tour the Central North Island and visit Auckland. This group consisted of different age groups and abilities. It was a great experience, and gave me the chance to practice my rusty French.

I also had my first brush with the world of wheelchair rugby, what an eye opener that was!

From June 2017 it was all on with the Lions Tour, an event that only happens every 12 years. Easy Rider was contracted by the Rugby Foundation to transport former injured NZ Rugby Players to Test One and Two at Eden Park and to various fundraising events which I also got to attend. One of the

highlights was a dinner at Eden Park where I sat at a table with Graham Mourie while the likes of BJ Williams, Rory Underwood, and Grant Fox reminisced about past Lions Tours and discussed upcoming games.

Driving in Auckland with a large coach, such as Easy Rider, is challenging at the best of times and getting the Players to the Barbarian dinner in Auckland, held at the same time as the Americas Cup Parade at the Viaduct was no exception, but worth it. Graham Henry, Sean Fitzpatrick, Gavin Hastings and many more great legends attended this event, the atmosphere was fantastic.

Earlier this year the 2017 Asia Oceania Wheel Chair Rugby Champs, were held in NZ and played by teams from Australia (who are rated 1st in the world and Paralympics Gold Medallists), Japan (who are 3rd in the World), Korea and New Zealand. This was a tournament held over 8 busy days. For the non-initiated, Wheelchair Rugby is very fast and physical and involves impressive skill. It is an exciting sport to watch, especially when the world's best are playing.



Easy Rider is also very proud to provide transport for the Halberg Junior Disability Games. Last year held in Hamilton, this year in Auckland. Hundreds of children from all over New Zealand compete over 3 days.

In addition to such events Easy Rider provides transport for many local smaller groups within the Waikato. This includes groups from Rest Homes, Stroke and Rehabilitation Clubs and Senior Citizens. This is the other side of the business which I really enjoy. I get to meet and interact with people from all sorts of backgrounds and ages, having lived interesting and fulfilled lives. We have travelled to many different destinations in the Waikato, visiting animal parks, studs, expositions and natural wonders. I have come to realise there is much to see. Allowing mixed groups of able and disabled likeminded people to travel together is a big part of the business I hope to further develop in the future.

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Transport provider to the Halberg Junior Disability Games      Email: [dirk@easyrider.co.nz](mailto:dirk@easyrider.co.nz)

