

Sixty-one elite athletes – who together hold 24 World Championships – will contest next month's Abu Dhabi International Triathlon (ADIT), making the UAE capital event one of the most highly anticipated races of the year.

The stellar line up includes four-time World Champions Chris McCormack and Craig Alexander and defending champions Spain's Eneko Llanos and Great Britain's Julie Dibens.

On March 12th, the start-line will feature global athletes who together hold more than 50 Ironman titles and over 100 national titles.

"This is a powerful line-up with truly lives up to our call to amateurs to 'Compete With The Elite'," said Faisal Al Sheikh, Events Manager, Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority, (ADTA), which presents the event. "The best the sport has will be in Abu Dhabi which is a ringing endorsement for an event which is only in its second year."

McCormack and Alexander are highlights of the men's field having together dominated the pinnacle of the sport Kona, Hawaii for the past four years, with McCormack winning in 2010 and 2007 and Alexander in 2008 and 2009.

"I love new races in new destinations, especially one with as much mystique as Abu Dhabi. This will be my first race of the season and my first competitive race in the Middle East," said Alexander.

However the pair from down under will be persistently challenged by the top three men from 2010's inaugural race – Eneko Llano, Dirk Bockel and Rasmus Henning – who are back to protect their titles and in better form than ever before. Eneko Llano started last year's season with a first and top ten finish at Kona. Rasmus Henning finished third in last year's event and since then has fought a strong 2010 season – including a momentous win at Germany's

coveted Challenge Roth.

“I had a great experience in Abu Dhabi last year and hope to return and improve my third place finish. The race course is world class which is reflected in the quality of athletes it has attracted this year – there will be a lot of athletes who will want to finish in the top three but will have a hard fight ahead of them,” said Henning.

Dirk Bockel, Olympic triathlete and second place at ADIT 2010 is ready to return to the UAE.

“I enjoyed the event so much last year that I didn’t hesitate to come back and defend my podium finish. Everything impressed me, from the organisation to the race course. I can’t wait to get back to Abu Dhabi for this world-class event.”

Also in the field and not to be missed will be nine-time Ironman New Zealand winner Cameron Brown,

Champion and course record-holder of Ironman Wisconsin 2010 Joe Gambles and multiple Ironman winner Raynard Tissink.

The women’s field easily rivals the men’s - boasting 14 of the World Championship titles, seven Ironman wins and over 35 national and regional titles. Leading the pack is Julie Dibens - ADIT defending champion and 2009 Ironman 70.3 World Champion and three-time Xterra World Champion (07, 08, 09). Diben’s will have Leanda Cave in hot pursuit – a past World Champion with a string of 70.3 podiums to her name is excited to race the event’s unique 223kms ‘pure power’ course.

Cave said, “It’s an epic event, it plays to my strengths of the swim and bike and I love a challenge -which is exactly what this course is. It’s not only the race I am looking forward to but also exploring the culture and sites of Abu Dhabi.”

The field is crowded with strong contenders including Jo Lawn seven-time Ironman New Zealand champion and Caroline Steffen, ITU Long Distance Triathlon World Championships and second-place at Ironman World Championships Hawaii – she also won many 2010 Ironman events including Asia Pacific, Switzerland, Singapore and Geelong, Australia.

The field also includes three-time Xterra Champion Melanie McQuaid, World Duathlon Champion (2006, 2010) Catriona Morrison and IM South Africa winner Sonja Tajsich

“Abu Dhabi has beautiful scenery for a triathlon race - the organisation is one of the best worldwide with an outstanding athlete field!” said two-time Ironman Champion Edith Niederfriniger.

Team Abu Dhabi returns to the race with a powerful squad - led by 2005 Kona World Champion Faris Al-Sultan. New addition to the team Paul Ambrose joins Jan Van Berkel, Swen Sundberg and Kristin Moeller. Rachel Joyce is back to prove she is in top condition after a shocking accident at last year's ADIT.

Joyce said, “As my race came to end rather dramatically in T1 last year, I am looking forward to finishing the race this year and especially having the opportunity to ride on the Formula 1 course.”

This year's event will be raced across three lengths. Professionals will contest a 3kms swim, a 200kms cycle and 20kms closing run. The shorter version, at half the length, has a 1.5kms swim, a 100kms cycle and a 10kms run, with both courses eligible for a share of the US\$250,000 prize purse.

Also a first for this year's edition, ADTA has also launched a unique 'sprint' distance as an entry platform for aspiring athletes. Comprising a 750m swim, 50kms bike and 5kms run, the new 'sprint' course is aimed at boosting uptake from novice racers across the Arabian Gulf and can be raced as an individual or as a team.