



**TOP DIGGER:**  
Bryce Coughlan shows the skills that earned him the title of Northland's best excavator operator at the Whangarei A&P Show. PHOTO/SUPPLIED

# Digger operator heads to nationals

Northland's best excavator operator is honing his egg-carrying and slam-dunk skills as he prepares for next month's Civil Contractors New Zealand (CCNZ) National Excavator Operator Competition.

Bryce Coughlan, of Clements Contractors, won the Northland competition last December at the Whangarei A&P Show, showing some deft skills to take the title.

Mr Coughlan will join the winners from eight other regions, along with 2016 defending national champion Steve Galbraith from Hawke's Bay, to battle it out at the Central Districts Field Days at Manfeild Park on March 17 and 18.

Competition manager Malcolm Abernethy says the national competition is an intense two-day event comprising four elements.

On the main course competi-

tors complete 12 to 15 activities in 60 minutes using 12-tonne Hitachi excavators, including pouring a cup of tea, carrying a fresh egg, slam-dunking a ball and a series of excavation exercises.

In the emergency scenario contestants must respond well to a realistic emergency situation involving first aid skills and emergency response.

In the "Gerald the Giraffe, the CablePrice Digger" event competitors are judged on how well they brief children as young as 2 on how to operate Gerald, a 1.7 tonne Hitachi mini digger.

Finally in the "One-Day Job" event competitors must construct something using a 5-tonne machine. The task is equivalent to a full-day task but must be completed in just 60 minutes.

Mr Abernethy said all elements demonstrate the skill and specialised knowledge needed to operate an excavator safely.