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Hard work (if you can get it)

DETERMINATION AND TOLERANCE OF TRAINING THROUGH MELBOURNE WINTERS ARE IN RISING RACING STAR JO HOGAN'S BLOOD. SHE CITES HER PARENTS' PASSION FOR RIDING – OBSERVED AT CLOSE QUARTERS SINCE SHE WAS ABOUT 8 – AND A SENSE THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE “SOME GENETIC POTENTIAL” AS THE REASONS SHE MADE A SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO CYCLING IN 2008

Less than 3 years ago Jo Hogan was learning the ins and outs of racing in the 'Latte Laps' beginners course at St Kilda Cycling Club. In mid May she flew to Milan, bound for the AIS's cycling base in Varese, in the foothills of the Italian Alps, to train and race with the Jayco Women's Development Team, regarded as one step below the national team.

To many, Jo's rise seems meteoric. It was only in 2008 that the former national-level cross-country runner made the decision to commit to serious competitive cycling. It was that year her parents, passionate riders, spent 6 months overseas on their mountain bikes and she says something “twiggled” in her.

“I thought, I don't want to be just training any more, I want to have a go at stepping up and racing. So I spent \$6000 – a lot of my life savings – on a bike and I got really serious.” Engaging former pro cyclist Stuart McKenzie as her coach, “from there it's been onwards and upwards,” she says.

Earlier this year, from 10 applicants, she was awarded the sixth annual Amy Gillett Foundation Cycling Scholarship. This includes an invitation to spend August and September in Europe racing with the Australian team as well as an altitude camp in Stelvio, Italy.

Jo is no stranger to the podium. In 2010 she was the overall winner of the National Road Series after winning the Tour of Canberra and the Tour of Geelong; she finished fifth overall in the Melbourne to Ballarat road race; won the Teschner Grand Prix and Creswick Handicap; came 11th in the women's road race of the Herald Sun World Cycling Classic in Ballarat – an event regarded as the World Championships 'warm-up' and attracting a consequently international field; and received the Victorian Road Cyclist of the Year award – from Cadel Evans, which she describes as a career highlight ... among other achievements. In 2011 she was third in the Cycling Australia Road National Championships ('the Nationals') road race at Buninyong and second in the criterium.

However, her rise has been far from without hard work, sheer determination and hours slogging it out in vicious weather.

“The year was really challenging,” Jo says. “I went to all the club races – out in the rain, the wet, the cold – and I didn't win a lot. It was 12 months of participating and learning, getting beaten and being in





different situations – coming into a sprint with another girl or being in a break with other girls then doing too much work, learning not to show your cards – not showing that you’re really tired. That just all comes through experience and making mistakes.

“There were times I thought ‘This is a really hard game’, and it was difficult to keep going.

“I sometimes forget that first period of progression, the first year,” she adds, “because the next 12 months (2010) I really stepped up and noticed the benefits of having built that base, of having put in all that work.”

In October last year, Jo’s friend and “super training partner”, SKCC A-Grader Nick Bensley, wrote a firsthand account of Jo’s tenacity and high pain threshold:

“Even by Melbourne standards, we all know that training through this winter [2010] has been particularly tough. After weeks of Jo not uttering a single complaint about the persistent cold, wind or rain, I began to wonder if she had a brain tumour or some sort of nerve disorder. I would become quietly annoyed – surely we could suffer together, find some mutual comfort in discussing the misery? The silence became an emasculating game that I would always lose.

“I found it shamefully gratifying when she finally cracked in mid-August. It was 6°C, pouring with rain on Burwood Highway and for the countless time that day we were abused by the stereotypical Commodore driver (complete with Southern Cross decal in the back window). At her request, we stopped mid-ride (!) at McDonalds, had an espresso and then continued on to the Dandenongs. That’s the full extent of Jo Hogan cracking.”

“What most don’t see is Jo’s unwavering, sickeningly focused commitment to training that far exceeds a desire for the external trappings of success. To guess at the root of her motivation, I suppose she simply loves the bike and the daily gladiatorial struggle it demands from its students.”

– NICK BENSLEY, TRAINING PARTNER



JO HOGAN

Originally Jo had wanted to try racing in Europe last year, but on the Australia Day weekend she broke her wrist in a criterium in Wangaratta and earned herself 3 days in hospital and some pins and plates. And a rest.

"It was kind of a blessing in disguise," she says. "Even though I missed out on going to the Tour of New Zealand in 2010, and that's basically a selection race for the national team. But then – with only about 6 weeks to train – I won a stage in the Tour of Tasmania. That was one of my first big wins and from that I platformed to winning other races in Australia."

MAKING A CAREER OUT OF CYCLING

Jo's goal – apart from selection for the UCI Road World Championships in Denmark in September, and beyond that for the London Olympics – is a professional contract in 2012.

In Varese, Jo will be under the wing of the Jayco Women's Development Team for a 5-week program. The program is about introducing up-and-coming Australian women riders to European racing, with plenty of support. "Instead of throwing riders into races like the Tour of Flanders, they've learnt that they need to gradually step people into international competition," Jo says. "At the moment there's a fair gap between a tour or 1-day race in Australia and racing against 150 girls on the cobbles in Belgium, for example.

"It's not just tactics but the challenge of being overseas for a long time, being with people who can't speak English, being away from your family."

For 3 years Jo has been trying to balance training and recovery with work and some kind of social life. Although a trained emergency nurse, she moved into the less demanding field of aged care nursing 2.5 years ago to help facilitate this. But on gaining a place on the Jayco Women's Development Team and unable to take any more time off work, she has now made the leap, leaving her job to pursue a career as a professional cyclist. "It's a financial gamble – I won't be earning any money this year. But it's an opportunity I need to take.

"No money ... that would be the downside of cycling," she adds. Even the pro contract she's hoping for in 2012 will only involve a base salary of about \$10,000.

The AGF Scholarship is generous, providing bike and gear sponsorship and services from the AIS. Prior to this Jo was the recipient of a full scholarship from the Victorian Institute of Sport, which provided pretty much everything cycling-related – bike sponsorship and maintenance, use of VIS facilities (including gym, massage, physiotherapy and sports psychologist), coaching, accommodation and race entry fees.

"Every little thing adds up, you don't realise it. I take it for granted a bit that I get so well looked after now. I forget the time when I had to buy every tube, have my own race wheels ..."

At 30, Jo has potentially many years racing ahead of her. While men peak around 30 years of age, women's endurance reaches a peak later, she says, citing Judith Arndt (35) and Bridie O'Donnell (36) as examples of racing women in their prime.

When starting out Jo talked with fellow SKCC member Bridie – now in her second year with an Italian-based team – about her experiences. "Bridie's advice was to make contacts, get to know people." She says her friend, former pro and masseur Andy Naylor, is a also good sounding board.

Jo describes Judith Arndt, a pro rider for a decade and currently on one of the best teams in the world – and who broke her wrist twice last year – as "pretty inspirational".

"I'm lucky enough to have ridden against Judith in New Zealand at the

beginning of this year. She's just amazing to watch – so fluid on the bike, an effortless rider. I was in a break with her and we were chasing Ruth Corset. I was just hanging off Judith's back wheel while she seemed to be pedalling effortlessly up the hill. It was really good to be in that company."

A DAY 'AT THE OFFICE'

In the fortnight before going overseas, Jo was doing 500 to 700 kilometres training a week. She does a bit of Beach Road riding, but as a climber prefers the Dandenongs, Keilor Park or 'The Burbs' loop. Jo trains to power and has an SRM PowerControl V meter on her bike measuring her crank-based power. She provides her data to the AIS (a partner in the AGF Scholarship) and to coach Stuart.

She says although Stuart doesn't always come out to races, she speaks to him "pretty much every day" and credits this constant communication as underpinning the success of the partnership. "He knows me so well. It's not just about my training but knowing what else is going on in my life because that affects my training ... working late, not sleeping enough."

Jo describes the process of working towards the 2011 National titles with Stuart and her support team as another career highlight. This included doing some mental training for the first time, with a sports psychologist from the VIS.

"That really gave me confidence. I felt really good on the day. The mind is a very powerful thing and you can talk yourself out of a lot of things, so I did a lot of work trying to figure out how I would feel at different points in the race – it's called 'thought-stopping', when you think you're reaching your limit you divert your attention to something else. It's very effective."

A FAMILY PASSION

Her parents' passion for riding – "for getting up and getting out there" – has been a strong influence on Jo.

Her dad Gerard, now 52, took up cycling when he was about 30 to get fit. In 1996, having caught the bug, he took a year off work to focus on his racing, doing Melbourne–Shepparton, Melbourne–Ballarat and Melbourne–Warrnambool that year, finishing in the top 30 in the latter.

Her mum Jennifer, 50, competed in the Victorian road titles when she was in her mid-30s after she had only been riding for a few years and finished in the top 10. "One of the first rides my mum ever did was to Frankston – dad made her do it – and she'd never really ridden a bike before. She survived, so I thought, 'I can do that'."

Observing her dad's training and racing regime at close quarters, "the routine that he had, out in the rain and sun", was a big influence. "We had to drive out and pick him up from Kinglake one day: he'd ridden out and it was pretty much snowing and he'd become hypothermic," Jo giggles.

But she says that her brother, Ash, is the family member with the greatest natural ability. "He used to come out on family rides and blow away everyone's wheels without ever having done any training."

Jo says her parents were "a bit apprehensive" about how passionate about racing she was becoming. "But once they could see how I continued to race after not really getting anywhere early on they realised I wasn't going to give up, although there was talk of it.

"And they were pretty proud parents, I think, at the Nationals when I got my trophy," she says. *

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www.amygillett.org.au/amy-gillett-scholarship

THE GRAN FONDO COMES TO OZ

The spectacle that is the Gran Fondo – the long-distance, mass-participation cycling event so popular in Italy that some are televised live – is coming to Australia.

As they say, it never rains it pours: 2 Gran Fondos are on the way. The first is Amy's Gran Fondo, to be run by the Amy Gillett Foundation (AGF) on the Great Ocean Road and through the Otways on Sunday 18 September (see page 62).

This will be a 120-kilometre mass-participation event for up to 3000 riders, with all roads closed to traffic and more than \$20,000 in prize money up for grabs.

Endorsed by Cycling Australia (CA), the event is expected to draw riders from across Australia. While there is a competitive element, AGF CEO Tracey Gaudry, dual Olympian and former pro cyclist, says Amy's Gran Fondo is for all levels of rider.

"Amy's Gran Fondo will be staged by rider speed, so riders can ride at their leisure or compete for prize money if they are inclined."

The second Gran Fondo will be the Opperman

Gran Fondo on Saturday 26 November in Launceston. The event has been named in honour of Sir Hubert Opperman, a pioneer of Australian cycling's entry into European and International racing in the 1930s.

The Opperman Gran Fondo will cover 160km through the Tamar Valley, famous for its wine and gourmet foods, then through Beaconsfield and the rolling hills towards Frankford before passing through the historic region of Evandale.

The ride is the feature event of the new Launceston Pro Ex Cycling Week – 7 days of cycling in the Launceston region, including a training camp with professionals such as local stars, Richie Porte (Saxo Bank-Sungard) and Matt Goss (HTC Highroad).

The Gran Fondo is run with full mechanical and medical support and all bikes are fitted an electronic timing device, with prizes on offer for the fastest times in different age groups up the 8km Holwell Hill, which rises at a gradient of 5%.

Porte and Goss will share top billing for the



HUBERT OPPERMAN

Launceston Criterium, which will start later the same day as the Opperman Gran Fondo.

The Launceston Pro Ex Cycling Week runs from 20 to 27 November 2011 and will also include a 3-day Tassie Trail Mountain Bike Challenge for off-riders. *

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Amy's Gran Fondo, www.amygillett.org.au/gran-fondo;
Opperman Gran Fondo, [www.usmevents.com.au/
Cycling/Launceston_Pro-Ex-Cycling/
Opperman_Gran_Fondo.htm](http://www.usmevents.com.au/Cycling/Launceston_Pro-Ex-Cycling/Opperman_Gran_Fondo.htm)

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