

The Women of RAAM

Candace Koska

The Austrian adventurer and three-time RAAM champion Wolfgang Fasching once said that although climbing Mt. Everest is more dangerous, RAAM is much harder. In fact, so challenging that roughly 50% of the men who attempt solo RAAM do not finish.

As recently as the 1970's some people believed that women were incapable of handling the stresses of extreme sports such as running a marathon or other endurance events. In fact, it was not until 1971 that the New York Marathon officially added a women's division to their event—five long years after Roberta Gibb sneaked onto the Boston Marathon course and ran an unofficial time of 3h21m25s.

Well, what about RAAM? How would women handle the challenges and stresses of the World's Toughest Bicycle Race? The answer: at least as well as the men who enter!

The first woman to take a shot at completing the Race Across America was Kitty Goursolle in 1983. Although she didn't successfully finish the Race, she made history simply by attempting it. To date, 54 women have tried 81 times and statistically their finish rate is nearly identical to the men—just over 50%.

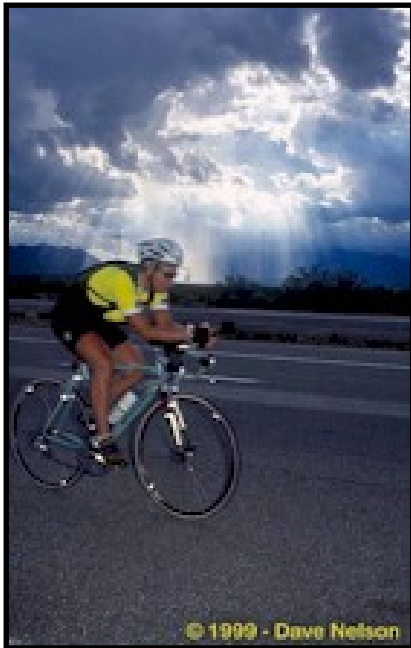


Endurance cycling requires an incredible strength of character and a determined personality. One of the most memorable riders in RAAM history is Elaine Mariolle who was inducted to the UltraCycling Hall of Fame in 2006. Mariolle is often described as delightful, enthusiastic, dedicated and positive. Everyone loved her personality yet she was equally impressive on the bike. Mariolle finished RAAM only one year after purchasing a bicycle! She also set numerous records not the least of which was her transcontinental record of 10d2h in her 1986 winning RAAM attempt.

Another woman to make a serious mark on the Race lined up at the start only one year after Goursolle's history-making attempt. Susan Notorangelo raced Solo RAAM in 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1989, winning the race twice and achieving a second place finish once! During the course of Notorangelo's cycling career, she held the women's 24-hour record, the women's transcontinental record, set the



women's record for Paris-Brest-Paris and set the women's RAAM record at a remarkable 9d9h. These outstanding achievements established the standard for the future of women's endurance cycling. Notorangelo's RAAM record stood for eight years until another extraordinary woman rode onto the scene in the early 1990s.



Seana Hogan entered the race for the first time in 1992 and competed every year until 1998. Hogan won RAAM an astonishing six times in those seven years, setting the still standing women's record of 9d4h32m. This amazing time would have won the event overall eight times in the race's 28-year history. In fact, in 1995 Hogan led the race through the first 1,000 miles before being caught by two-time RAAM champion Danny Chew (1996 and 1999) on what could be called the toughest climb of the race. Chew recalls chasing Hogan all the way to Colorado for four years in a row before successfully passing her. Many refer to Hogan as "the best endurance cyclist ever." This is difficult to argue considering that she either holds or held almost every endurance cycling record available from 100 miles to RAAM. To date, Hogan holds the record for most wins in RAAM by either a man or woman.

However, Hogan didn't quite get there alone; she had to contend with some serious competition! Muffy Ritz pedaled on to the scene in 1993. A noteworthy athlete on many levels, Ritz' accomplishments include two-time champion of the Super Bowl of cross-country ski racing, the American Birkebeiner; world champion mountain biker; and elite adventure racer. Ritz competed against Hogan in 1993, 1995 and 1997, finishing second on all three occasions. However, it should be noted that her times (9d16h, 9d6h and 10d11h) would have won the race in just about any other year had Hogan not been racing. Arguably RAAM's most significant mano-a-mano competition thus far has been proffered not by two men, but by two women—Hogan and Ritz.



RAAM is the Everest of endurance cycling and many solo riders attempt the challenge for one simple reason: because it's there. As such, the men's race is traditionally a collection of elite endurance athletes from around the globe. However until 2000, the women's race was All-American. Cassie Lowe of Sydney, Australia changed that. Lowe raced in 2000 and 2001 and won the Race both times she entered. This would mark the first time a non-American female not only entered the Race, but also won it. In 2009, Daniela Genovesi



won the women's division becoming the first Latin American woman to be called RAAM champion.

Every cyclist that manages to complete the Race from one coast of the United States to the other within the race cut-off times is undoubtedly a champion. So, it is with great respect that we honor the women who have earned the title of RAAM finisher:

Elaine Mariolle (84, 85, 86)
Shelby Hayden-Clifton (84, 85)
Pat Hines (84)
Susan Notorangelo (85, 86, 89)
Casey Patterson (87)
Cheryl Marek (87, 90)
Cindi Staiger (88)
Marie Costellic (87)
Karen Anderson (88)
Nancy Raposo (90)
Michelle Grainger (90)
Cathy Ellis (91)
Debbie Breaud (91)
Susan France (91)
Bonnie Allison (92)
Debbie Turner (92)
Seana Hogan (92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98)
Muffy Ritz (93, 95, 97)
Emmy Klassen (94)
Jodi Grosbeck (94)
Julie Johnson Bilger (94)
Cassie Lowe (00, 01)
Cat Berge (05)
Shanna Armstrong (06)
Janet Christiansen (09)
Daniela Genovesi (09)