

S. Tahoe woman tearing it up at XTERRA competitions

By Jessie Marchesseau

Spending three hours dragging yourself and your bicycle over rocks, streams and mountains, swimming through cold and choppy waters, and scrambling down trails of dirt, sand and mud may not sound like your typical Sunday stroll.

Unless, that is, you are XTERRA athlete Heather Lyman.

Lyman, a South Lake Tahoe resident, will be competing in the XTERRA World Championship race in Maui today.



Heather Lyman
of South Lake
Tahoe is
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Photo/Kevin
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XTERRA races are essentially off-road triathlons. They involve open water swimming, mountain biking and trail running. A sort of competition of outdoor enthusiasts. And Lyman is good at it.

“You’ve got to realize, this is her first year, and look at where she is,” Eufay Wood, personal trainer and co-owner of

Sierra Athletic Club, said. "She has a lot of natural skill."

Not only did the 30-year-old qualify for the World Championship race, but Lyman also took home the top spot in the women's 30-34 age group at the XTERRA USA Championship race in Ogden, Utah, in September.

She started the season with a third-place finish in the women's amateur division of the XTERRA Real in Granite Bay in March. Her time of 2 hours, 24 minutes, 27 seconds earned her second place in her age group. She followed that performance with a fifth-place finish in the amateur division and third in her age group at the XTERRA Pacific in Santa Cruz.

The Tahoe City race in June brought Lyman back to her home turf where she earned her first win of the season, taking the top spot in the 30-34 age group, second among the amateur women. She had hoped to continue the season with a strong finish at the August race in Incline Village, but a torn MCL forced her out of competition for nearly two months.

Though she says her knee still bothers her a little, it did not keep her from winning yet again at the Championship race in Utah. At just more than 3 hours, 5 minutes, Lyman was first in her age group and second in the amateur division.

Finishing in the top five of every race and overcoming a midseason injury would be a feat for any athlete. The fact that Lyman managed it without adhering to a formal training regime speaks loudly to the natural skill Wood mentioned.

Lyman generally does some sort of workout seven days a week, often more than one sport, but she is not shy about taking a day off if her body is tired. She trains with Wood twice a week in the gym, however prefers to do the majority of her training outdoors. She even admits to watching YouTube videos for tips on swim technique.

What Lyman may lack in strict workout regimes, she makes up

for in sheer determination.

“Her work ethic is beyond comparison,” Reve Ramos said. “She prepares better than anyone I know currently.”

Ramos met Lyman a little more than a year ago at one of the spin classes he instructs at Sierra Athletic Club. Ramos has been teaching and coaching sports nearly all his life and has seen some great athletes, but says Lyman is truly unique. She has already inspired other women in spin class to follow in her footsteps.

“One thing that really drives me is that I’m super competitive,” Lyman said, and added with a laugh, “It’s kind of annoying.”

But she did not set out to win. Not in the beginning, anyway. She entered a race last summer just for fun and because it was a good way to get into shape. She finished third in her age group, and was hooked.

“I always feel like I accomplish something by the time I cross the finish line. All that hard work that goes into it feels good when you actually come across the line and know, first of all, that it’s over and that you can do it,” Lyman said.

Looking to the future, she hopes to compete at the professional level eventually, and a good finish at the World Championships in Maui could go a long way in helping her achieve that goal. The race, which consists of a one mile rough-water swim, an 18.3 mile mountain bike ride and a 6.1 mile trail run, attracts more than 600 athletes from 28 countries. A top finish in the amateur division could earn her serious bragging rights.

Ramos, who has watched his own daughter become a professional athlete, says he believes this is just the beginning for Lyman: “Above all, she has the sweetest, gentlest heart, but it roars like a lion.”