



# TRANSITION

IT'S A GIRL THING with Chrissie Wellington



If I can do it, anyone can! That's the message I want to convey to all the women and girls who are thinking of taking up triathlon, wondering whether they can do an Ironman or are considering going professional. As the legendary Dave Scott once said, "If you never take any chances, you'll never realise your full potential".

# NO LIMITS

Success is within your reach!

TEXT BY CHRISSIE WELLINGTON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TEAM CHALLENGE

As a child growing up in the UK, I used to watch a TV show called *Record Breakers*. One of my childhood dreams was to one day be a 'Record Breaker'. Other dreams, incidentally, were to run the London Marathon and be a tractor driver (my tractor training has unfortunately been put on hold). In July this year I made my first dream a reality – by breaking the world record and becoming the fastest ever Ironman distance triathlete at the historic Quelle Challenge in

Roth, Germany. I am so proud to have achieved this feat and have my name etched in the triathlon history books. And, of course, it was a fantastic excuse to 'sample' vast quantities of (solid and liquid) German delights after the race!

But back to breaking records... This achievement made me realise that it wasn't just the record that was driving me; it goes deeper than that. Throughout my life I have been driven by the simple urge to be the best that I can be, at whatever

I am doing at the time. I never want to look back and think "what if". To me, the deepest satisfaction comes from knowing that I have reached my full potential and pushed myself to my limit – often realising that my limit is much further than I ever thought possible.

I have always enjoyed sport. At school I participated in most of the sports on offer, although my main focus was always on doing well academically. And while my gymnastics career

came to a grinding halt when I realised that I had the coordination and balance of a baby giraffe, I did find I had more ability in the swimming pool. So I joined a local swimming club from the age of nine – training four times a week and competing in local competitions.

At 18, I left home to study at the University of Birmingham. I remember the day my dad dropped me off and said to me, "Christine, go for it. Take every opportunity that comes your way". And I did. While my classes were always my main priority, I also joined some clubs and teams, including the swimming team. However, it wasn't until I started my MA in 2000, after two years travelling around the world, that I started running. And then it hit me – I *could* fulfil one of my childhood dreams and run the London Marathon. Two years later that is exactly what I did, surpassing my wildest expectations and finishing in 3:08. That was the start of something special – a flirtation with competitive sport that progressed into an all-out obsession!

Unfortunately, not long after this, I was hit by a car and the devastating result was that I could no longer run, so I got back in the swimming pool to help my recovery. Then, in 2004, I met a guy who turned the course of my life around. His name is Paul Robertshaw from the Birmingham Running and Tri Club (BRATS), and he was the one who suggested I try triathlon. It was his belief in me that

made me realise I could do something I had never done before.

I did a few sprint and Olympic distance triathlons in 2004, all with toe-clip pedals, a second-hand bike, a borrowed wetsuit and very little idea about, well, anything! But what I lacked in knowledge and equipment I made up for in passion.

In my very first race my shoe laces became entangled around my bike cranks, and resulted in me doing an ungainly and spectacular dismount into T2! But despite the hiccups, I loved the sport and thrived on the buzz that triathlon gave me.

I spent two years in Nepal and returned to the UK in 2006, determined to train hard whilst juggling my hectic social life and day job as a government policy advisor.

Then one rainy day in May I toed the start line at the National Sprint Championships. But my borrowed wetsuit flooded mid-race and I had to be rescued by a kayaker – not the most auspicious start to a triathlon career!

Undaunted, I bought another second-hand bike and entered the Shropshire Triathlon. The night before, Paul patiently taught me how to mount and dismount, and use my shiny new clip-in pedals and shoes. Much to my surprise I won and qualified for the World Age Group Championships in Lausanne, Switzerland, in September 2006. I trained really hard for the rest of the summer – juggling 20 hours

of training a week with my full-time job. I was so pleased just to be going to Lausanne and competing for my country, so it was a great result when I won!

That win and then taking the risk to go professional was the start of something very special. But life is all about taking risks, and if I hadn't taken the chances given to me I wouldn't be sitting here now as double World Ironman Champion.

Deep down we all have that seed, that little voice. But I think some of us are scared to listen to it, scared to try, scared of failure. Fear can be immobilising, but it is our own personal construct, and therefore doesn't actually exist in reality. Fear of the unknown could have stopped me giving up my job and having a crack at professional triathlon. But, instead, I took the risk, put in the hard work and reached my goals.

I am reminded of the words of Dr Benjamin E. Mays, who was a mentor to civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr: "The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. It is not a disgrace to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for." It is reaching the stars that drives me each and every day. If I can do it, so can you. Dare to dream. There are no limits to what you can achieve! 📸



TAPPING INTO YOUR POTENTIAL: At Quelle Challenge Roth, Germany, 2009, Chrissie Wellington accomplishes her dream of being a 'record breaker'



RECORDS FALL: Quelle Challenge Roth, Germany

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