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**TRACK CYCLIST
GEA JOHNSON**

ON SETTING RECORDS,
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OLYMPICS AND MORE—ALL
WHILE DEFYING MODERN
SCIENCE IN MEDICAL
PROCEDURES

**8 CRAZY
FACTS
ABOUT
MIRRORS**

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Gea Johnson has three personal mantras that were ingrained in her by her single mom: I can accomplish anything I want if I put my mind to it; always believe in myself and believe in my dreams; and never give up. Now, at age 44 and embarking on a career as a competitive track cyclist, her unwavering confidence in herself and her abilities is launching her to record-breaking performances against women half her age.

Johnson is no stranger to competitive athletics. She was inducted into the ASU Sports Hall of Fame as a result of breaking 10 ASU heptathlon records and holding numerous PAC 10 and National track and field records. She followed her summa cum laude graduation from ASU with seven weightlifting titles and a stint on the U.S. Women's Olympic Bobsled Team in 2002. She has recovered from enough serious injuries and surgeries to rival the bionic woman, saying, "I've defied modern science in medical procedures." And yet, the thought of slowing down never seems to cross her mind. "I sort of give a voice to all of those middle-aged or older people out there who think they can't, or put a limit on their goals or their dreams because of age. Age doesn't determine that. You have to honor it, and you may have to shift or change things, but I don't let it stop me," the buoyant blonde declares.

Track cycling isn't particularly well known in Arizona, as there is no velodrome in the state. So how did Johnson come to choose the somewhat unlikely sport as her next challenge? When she was still competing in bobsled, track cycling had been mentioned to Johnson repeatedly by the professionals at Endurance Rehab as a sport in which she could most likely excel. When the time came to consider a new sport, she evaluated cycling along with rowing and speed skating.

"I chose it kind of arbitrarily. I just figured what sport could I do that would allow me to compete at a high level and

On Track to Win

Scottsdale track cyclist and all-around superwoman, Gea Johnson, talks about what it takes to compete and win in her 40s

utilize my strengths as an athlete, but not completely pound and thrash my body, because I killed it in the other sports that I've done," she explains. "I don't have to overcome gravity in cycling."

What also made the sport a good fit for Johnson was that it is all about sprinting, rather than distance. "I've never been a long-distance, cardiovascular, aerobic-type of athlete," she explains. "I've always been a sprinter, pure sprinter...speed, strength, and explosiveness to the Nth degree."

Although it seemed like a great fit, Johnson faced one big challenge—she had absolutely no experience on a bike. She recalls her friends laughing at her when she told them her plan.

"They said, 'The last time you rode a bike was on the Strand and you crashed in the bushes on a cruiser,'" she says, laughing. "I just researched it. I looked it up and figured, okay, I'm going to give this a go," she remembers.

Johnson started out learning the basics of cycling from Scottsdale's Strada Racing Club, and began training on the street with help from her team of trainers at Performance Enhancement Professionals in Scottsdale.

"A parking lot or a street is definitely nothing compared to training every day in a velodrome," Johnson explains. "It's a huge disadvantage. I won't lie. It's huge. But, this is what I have so I have to make the best of it," she says optimistically.

Without the benefit of a velodrome track to train on, Johnson relies heavily on her team of trainers and the unique training routine that they've developed for her based on her strengths and weaknesses on the bike and her age.

"Most cyclists would cringe if they knew the way I train. We've taken a more modern approach and applied those principles instead of the traditional volume-based training," she reveals. "That didn't work for me at all and I don't even ride my bike every day. Every week is different. There's a fine line between therapy and training at my age, so you have to honor that," she concludes.

Because of her age, Johnson says openly, "Sometimes I get therapy more during the week than I actually train. But as long as I do enough, I actually get a better result with the 'less is more' to a certain point, than I did when I was younger."

After just a few months of biking experience with no actual track experience, Johnson started competing, winning numerous medals at both the state and national levels. While riding at her first national competition in a 45-degree, banked velodrome, Johnson got cut off and barrel-rolled down the track, breaking her elbow and her wrist in numerous places.

"I knew there was something dreadfully wrong with my arm, and I had to duct tape it because all they had was cotton balls and a little spray," she recalls. "Five minutes later I was back on the track and

“I have the desire to continue to compete as long as I can compete on the highest level and continue to improve every time I go out there.”



racing. Now, I usually don't go anywhere without duct tape," she says with a grin.

Johnson's most recent track cycling accomplishment came in December 2011 when she rented out the velodrome in Los Angeles in an attempt to break a record in the 500M TT in her age group. Riding borrowed equipment and facing the challenge of the banked velodrome, official starting gates and being surrounded by crash pads, Johnson went for it. After a slow start, her training and competitive instinct kicked in, resulting in her breaking the American record on her first try. On her second time around, she bettered her time and came within two-tenths of a second of the world record.

Johnson will continue to train and race as long as possible, saying, "I feel like I've been given this talent and it's my obligation to fulfill it, in a way—to achieve my potential. ...I have the desire to continue to compete as long as I can compete on the highest level and continue to improve every time I go out there."

Despite the challenges, injuries, and aches and pains, she believes that being an athlete in her 40s is a blessing.

"I'm really fortunate because I get to do what I love to do and because I can. And maybe it's just as simple as that."

Reach Wendy Rubicam at www.rubicamwriting.com.

Gea Johnson

**TRACK CYCLING
RECORD HOLDER**

AGE: 44

STATUS: Single

DAY OF MEALS: Breakfast—oatmeal or eggs and toast, fruit. Protein bar or shake if she's in a hurry. Lunch—meat and veggies, or soup/salad or sandwich. Dinner—protein (eats a lot of red meat, some chicken and some fish), lots of veggies/salad and some type of bread or starch. Supplements with Optimum EFX drinks based on workouts. Snacks on nuts, cheese, yogurt, fruit, and cottage cheese.

FOOD WEAKNESS: Cheez-It crackers, candy, cheeseburgers and fries. "I'm a typical woman and I like to eat all the things that everyone else likes to eat, but I just do it in moderation."

SECRET WEAPON: Pre-workout energy "cocktail"—a proprietary blend with Optimum EFX Endure Forte and NeurOn in the mix, providing numerous benefits. "I swear by my special mix!"

TRAINING: Bike handling, sprinting, mechanics and equipment work with technical coach Lionel Space; training protocols created by Ian Danney—periodization, actual workouts both on the bike and in the weight room, all designed to integrate properly; training in the gym and bodywork/regeneration therapy with Brian DaCunha.

OUTSIDE OF SPORTS: Loves spending time with family, watching independent and foreign films, and eating out.

THOUGHTS ON SCOTTSDALE: "I love Scottsdale! There are so many great restaurants and beautiful places. I love going to the really cool resorts, sitting on the patio and seeing the sunset."