

# THE NEW BREED

Combine speed, endurance, agility, grit, navigational skills and a thirst for getting off the beaten track and you might just have what it takes to tackle the fast developing sport of adventure racing.

Blessed with some of the best coastline and rugged hinterland, WA is emerging as a destination for elite athletes and keen amateurs from Australia and around the world, all vying for the chance to put their bodies to the ultimate test.

Competitors swim, cycle, paddle, run and orienteer themselves around an all consuming course, often in teams, battling conditions and death defying terrain that is not for the faint hearted.

No stranger to pushing his limits, WA's reigning Triathlete of the Year, Sean O'Neill forged his path in adventure racing in 2007, taking part in the WA Anaconda Adventure Race held in Dunsborough's picturesque Geographe Bay region. Claiming fourth place, he hasn't looked back since.

Earlier this year Sean came third at the Anaconda National Event held on the Gold Coast and was part of the winning team in the gruelling two-day Mountain Designs Great Southern Adventure Race in Albany in September 08.

A seasoned athlete, Sean started his triathlon career as a junior competitor following encouragement from one of his teachers. A keen cross-country runner, he entered and won his first event at age 12, giving him the taste for this sport that would become his passion.

In 2003, Sean competed in the Age Group World Championships in New Zealand where a bronze medal gave him his ticket to turn professional. He has since taken the title of WA Triathlete of the Year four times in the WA State series run by Triathlon WA.

Now 25, Sean attributes his inspiration for the sport, which involves a combination of swimming, cycling and running, to the deep satisfaction he gets from being competitive in all three disciplines.

"A lot of people find a niche in one particular sport or area of their life and work hard to perfect that, but I find that being good in various sports is quite difficult to achieve."

"Triathlon, and adventure racing even more so, are difficult events just to finish on occasions so there is a great deal of satisfaction in completing them. To place on the podium or win an event is the ultimate!" he said.

This is a philosophy he tries hard to replicate in all areas of his life and Sean says that having a good career, relationship, family, financial and social life is as big a motivation for him as the individual disciplines of triathlon and adventure racing.

Sean describes the training regime for adventure racing as quite different to that of triathlon. Typically, triathlon training involves around 15 hours per week of speed-based training where you work at 80 to 100% capacity.

"Because adventure racing often requires an element of orienteering and problem solving as well as athleticism, the approach is quite different, combining both brain and brawn," he said.

He now combines his triathlon training during the week with more rugged adventure-style pursuits like mountain biking on weekends.

His latest accomplishment was winning the team event of the Great Southern Race in September. With a world-class team comprising of Olympic rower Sally Newmarch, former SAS soldier Richard Elderfield and orienteering whiz Stephen Mundell, the team finished the course in 25:11:02.

The event consisted of two days of stage racing covering over 250km of mixed terrain which involved running, mountain biking, ocean and river paddling, navigation and rope work - including abseiling down the breathtaking and somewhat treacherous Natural Bridge rock formation in Frenchman's Bay.

The rules enabled one member of the team to sit out on each leg, allowing for some recuperation time during the event and for the team to take advantage of each of the competitor's strengths.

At one point Sean's bicycle seat shaft broke posing potential disaster. Richard's quick thinking and ingenuity turned a strong stick and some medical tape into a makeshift shaft which allowed them to finish the race.

With the next event on the racing calendar set for Dunsborough on November 2, you can be sure that Sean is one competitor who will be tearing it up with the fierce velocity people have come to expect.

There are not many races in the world where competitors get to share pristine waters with pods of dolphins and migrating whales, which are just some of the factors that put this event in a class of its own.

Adventure racing is fast becoming a sport popular with the white-collar worker keen to rid themselves of their week-day office confines and let loose with the fearless, gung ho attitude of a weekend warrior.

If the call of the wild or an insatiable urge to push your limits takes hold visit [www.rapidascent.com.au](http://www.rapidascent.com.au).



Starting the bike leg of the Perth Criterium Triathlon Series 2008.



Sean, streaking ahead at the National Triathlon Championships in Perth 2007.



Sean and Sally Newmarch power into shore during the Great Southern Adventure Race in Albany this year.