



LESLEY

Two-time XTERRA world champion Lesley Paterson is considered one of the hardest-working pro triathletes around, but her work ethic isn't centered around triathlon alone. This 100-pound Scottish powerhouse is striving for more than victories on the racing circuit—she's slowly building a fitness empire.

I think Lesley Paterson is trying to kill me. This thought enters my mind as I scurry up a cobblestoned hill in the middle of downtown San Diego in total darkness for what feels like the 4,000th time. My quads begin to burn, my heart leaps inside my chest and I glance behind me to see if she's watching me. She is. There's just no escaping her. I murmur defeat under my breath and determine who will posthumously acquire my vinyl record collection.

By Susan Grant Legacki : Photography by Donald Miralle

"Keep your chin up," she calls to me from the bottom of the hill. "Keep that foot speed fast up the hill, guys. C'mon, you've got it. Run!" About a dozen other runners and I round a tree and slowly jog our way back down toward her. "OK, you've got two more and then we're done. Make these count. Push yourselves hard," says Paterson, her Scottish accent punching the atmosphere in just the right way to make you catch your breath and listen. She might as well have her face painted Braveheart blue. We take our marks and on her command head up the hill twice more. And, just like the little blonde has instructed, we haul ass, all of the details on running mechanics she's explained during the previous hour falling into place with every step.

"Lesley will make you realize your potential in a way no one else can," says her training partner, Brandon Mills. "Her work ethic is unmatched. I'd been racing competitively for five years when I met her, and she got me to dig so deep in my training that a whole new level I had inside me kind of unfolded."

Paterson, all five feet of her, positively commands attention. Even

love was rugby. The bloody, run at someone and smash into each other with full force type of rugby. She was 8 years old when she started playing, and she was also the only girl. "Like everything else she's passionate about, Lesley just threw herself into rugby," remembers Fiona. "By the age of 10 she was team captain. She'd be at ballet rehearsal in the morning and then out on the rugby fields after school." But Scottish rugby rules dictated that once she began secondary school, there were no more coeds allowed on the team. So Paterson hung up her rugby cleats and put on her running shoes to head out with her father on his daily runs through the Scottish hillsides. "It didn't matter what it was like outside, and you can imagine how bad some of the Scottish winters can be," says Fiona. "Those two would just head straight for the hills and run all day. She loved it. And when he started doing triathlons, so did she."

By the time Paterson was 13, she had joined Great Britain's national team and had a Scottish championship title under her belt.

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dwarfed inside an enormously puffy black jacket, her curly blond hair slicked back into a bun, she exudes not so much confidence as raw tenacity. Paterson's good looks, athletic ability and notoriously salty language come together to create a pint-sized tornado—an unstoppable force whether charging up the hillsides of Maui on her mountain bike, helping a newbie triathlete learn proper swim technique, or leading a meeting for her film production company. With everything from workout videos and a stable of coached athletes to a possible reality TV series, Paterson, 32, could very well be the Oprah of triathlon if she plays her cards right. "It's not just about Lesley Paterson the athlete; it's Lesley Paterson the brand," says her film production and screenwriting partner, Ian Stokell. "She's the total package."

While she may be ripe for a synergistic explosion, Paterson is no overnight sensation. "It took Lesley years of really hard work to win her first XTERRA world championship title," says her mother, Fiona. "But she needed to win twice in order to really cement her place on top. Now that she's done that, I think she's got the credibility she always deserved."

Like so many success stories, Paterson's begins with a few failures. Raised in the small Scottish town of Stirling, her original

She began to set her sights on becoming a professional triathlete. But when the ITU began draft-legal racing in the mid '90s, Paterson's swim just never seemed to make the cut, and by the time she failed to make the 2002 Commonwealth Games, 22-year-old Paterson was officially burned out. "In her last years on the national team, they were very data-driven with their athletes," says her husband, Simon Marshall. "And Lesley's not a lab athlete. They'd run all these tests on her, and her data was just never there. They'd be like 'According to our calculations, your power means you'll never be faster than this.' Well, that's hard to hear every day. They told her that cycling was her Achilles heel. So she believed that it was."

Paterson met Marshall while studying drama and English at Loughborough University. She was still competing, but with a heavy heart. "She was the only girl on our university's cycling team," remembers Marshall. "And every week we would just completely drop her. So she started carrying this map around in her back pocket so she'd know how to get back home when she lost us. And she kept on coming back. And sure enough, eventually, she'd hang with us the whole time. I noticed her right away."





The two were married in 2002, and when Marshall, a behavioral psychologist, got a teaching position at San Diego State University, Paterson jumped at the opportunity to move to the States and leave triathlon behind. In San Diego, Paterson began working on her Masters in theatre at SDSU, and it was while up on stage she felt something inside her that she hadn't felt in years. "Everything changed for me," says Paterson. "All the passion I'd had for triathlon was replaced by this passion for acting. I was in love with it."

Paterson began landing roles in student films and independent films, and eventually she started spending so much time up in Los Angeles on auditions that she and Marshall rented an apartment there in addition to their home down in San Diego. The transition from triathlete to actress isn't as far-fetched as one might imagine. "There's a correlation between the determination you need in triathlon and what you need to make it in Hollywood," says Stokell, who met Paterson when she was auditioning for an indie film he was working on. "In both cases, you just have to be absolutely relentless."

But, much like in her days on the national team, for every success she saw there would be untold rejections, and while Paterson loved

Paterson also knew that it was time to return to competition. She could feel it. She started slowly with some running races, and right off the bat things felt different—and she was winning left and right. "I think Lesley needed that break from sport," says Fiona. "It gave her time to grow up and become an adult. When she came back, she was so much more confident about it."

In 2008 Paterson entered XTERRA SoCal in Temecula, Calif., and once again had a shift of passion, this time back to the world of triathlon. She exited the water with former Ironman world champion Michellie Jones, and soon after grabbed the lead on the bike and never looked back. "I thought to myself, 'This frickin' rules!'" says Paterson. She entered T2 like a bat out of hell and then literally fell over when her feet hit the ground. Having not taken in a single calorie or liquid on the entire ride despite the intense heat, Paterson stumbled onto the run course. "I walked the whole damn run. I ended up eighth I think, but it didn't matter. I was hooked."

Soon after the race, she began working with San Diego cycling coach Vince Fichera and hitting the XTERRA race circuit in between shifts at B & L and screenwriting meetings. Fichera put her in the

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living the life of a struggling actress, once again her passion wasn't giving her any solid returns—and she was draining their bank account in the process. "Simon and I were broke and living in two different cities. It isn't good for a marriage," Paterson confesses. "I took several awful jobs just to try and bring in money. I was a shitty waitress, I worked at a yogurt shop, but the worst was as a 'recruiter' for a modeling agency where I basically stalked mothers and their children and tried to convince them they needed to get their kids in commercials. A few weekends of that and I wanted to shoot myself."

Stokell convinced Paterson to try her hand behind the camera on the producing and screenwriting side. By 2008, the two of them had started their own production company, Sliding Down Rainbows Entertainment Inc., and had produced several short films. Paterson moved back down to San Diego full time and was working at B & L Bike Shop in Solana Beach. "Lesley never complained when things got hard," says Stokell. "She just got three jobs and did what had to be done. She was on the path to something great, and she knew it. She's strong like that. I think a lot of people just aren't."

gym, where she shed what little body fat she had and replaced it with muscle, creating what continues to be her secret weapon: her power-to-weight ratio. "That's what the lab rats never realized with Les," says Marshall. "She became this little 100-pound power packet, and her bike is now stronger than ever."

Her schedule also became more jam-packed, and she would often be up at 4:30 a.m. on her trainer, with her laptop propped up on a trash can, getting in her training before work, and most days once again after her shift was over. "Once I was at work I'd be dashing off into the loo to take work calls about production jobs with Ian," remembers Paterson. "It was nonstop, just total craziness."

One morning in 2009, Fichera told Paterson to do time-trial repeats up a notorious climb in San Diego's East County called Honey Springs. She'd have to do it before work, but when she woke up it was raining heavily. She called Stokell and together they drove out at sunrise, where he followed right behind her in his car with the lights on in order to keep her safe as she made her way up the climb. "The whole time he's following me, he's also on the phone with film companies in



the U.K., pitching one of our projects," laughs Paterson. "He'd be yelling out status updates to me while I climbed through absolutely pissing rain. 'Sorry Les, they passed on that one. This one might be a good choice. Let me call them now.' Talk about complete frickin' madness."

Her results were promising though, and Paterson began to make a startling realization that would eventually catapult her racing performance and crystallize her professional life goals. "I realized when I started racing XTERRA that up until then I'd just been so unempowered in my life. From my days on the national team, to all the auditions and the rejections I'd been put through, I'd been pushed down constantly," she says. "But I felt like I'd come out the other side. I'd pushed through all of that into owning my own business and racing XTERRA and feeling so free and happy. I'd finally been given the confidence I needed and deserved, and once I felt that, everything just built from there."

While it would be difficult to find one photo to encapsulate such an epiphany, Paterson's finish line photo from her first XTERRA World Championship title in 2011 comes pretty close. She'd had a flat tire in T2, and then later fallen flat on her face in the sand, puncturing her leg right at the knee. In the photo you see her face covered in grime, a heavy trickle of blood streaming down her leg and a smile on her face as she makes her final push for the finish tape. "Lesley's a scrappy, blue-collar triathlete," says Marshall. "I think that's a bit of an anomaly in triathlon, but maybe it's why XTERRA made more sense to her. She doesn't want to hear about the science of bike position. She doesn't want to know what the weather conditions are. She just wants to go."

But despite Paterson's devil-may-care reputation, the truth is that after so many years training for races, she happens to know a hell of a lot about it.

"People started asking me all these coaching questions, and at the time it kind of surprised me how I always seemed to know the answers," she says. "So I started coaching, and I discovered that it's something I have a true talent for."

In a nod to her Scottish heritage and love for film, Paterson named her new coaching business Braveheart Coaching, and she began putting on Braveheart Bootcamps in and around San Diego. As a coach, Paterson was able to put together the final pieces of her own rebirth as a professional athlete. She found that finding the confidence and passion behind other people's journey through sport gave her own performances that much more meaning.

When Stacy Sauls, 50, first started training with Paterson, she was recovering from a terrible bike crash sustained during her first triathlon. She attended a Braveheart Bootcamp and was immediately sent out on a famously hilly San Diego ride called the Great Western Loop. "Lesley knew I would be frightened on the descent so she came right up to me at the top of the mountain and just talked it out with me," remembers Sauls. "She and Vince Fichera stayed with me the whole way down, and we just started bombing the hill. I was literally shaking and crying at the bottom. Not from fear though—I was so unbelievably proud of myself. It's changed my approach on the bike ever since, and because of Lesley I was able to push through that fear barrier. It completely changed me as a person."

Stories like Sauls' are exactly what Paterson hopes to see more of as her coaching company grows. She's starring in a series of fitness DVDs for endurance athletes, and is currently in talks to star in a reality TV show where she helps several female nonathletes to overcome their fears and compete in their first triathlon. "I feel I have the reliability, the compassion and the credibility

as an athlete now to really help people on a large scale," says Paterson. "People think they have to be a great athlete to be coached, and that's just not true. All I need to see is passion in someone. And I'm good at finding that in other people."

Spend a few days with Paterson, and it's easy to see what someone driven by passion looks like. On a recent Saturday afternoon, Paterson was attending the prerace packet pickup for a local 10K. She'd been up since 4:30 a.m., first knocking out a one-hour run and then hammering out a 40-mile group ride before doing another 40-mile loop at tempo pace on her own. She'd put on some makeup and changed in the car before heading to the race expo in order to make sure her coached athletes were all outfitted in their matching Braveheart Coaching T-shirts for Sunday's race (where she finished fourth overall).

"Lesley just draws people in," says her business manager, Leigh-Ann Webster. "She's passionate, but she's not blindly passionate. She's willing to change course if she's told there's a better way to do something, and that flexibility is a real asset."

Indeed, the biggest challenge for Paterson may very well be learning how to say no. "Her nickname in college was the 'cluster bomb,'" jokes Marshall. "Because she just hits the ground and scatters in every direction, in every sense of the word. She needs people to rein her in a bit, but that's why she has a support team around her to help that happen at times." According to her closest friends and family, Marshall is the most valuable member of that team. With a background in sports psychology, he's well versed in the struggles of pro athletes, especially in their relationships. "I know what it takes to be a successful pro ath-

lete on a psychological level," he says. "In most relationships, one person is usually the flower, and the other is the gardener. Traditionally, the woman is the gardener. With us right now that dynamic is reversed. But I enjoy helping Lesley grow, actually. I genuinely enjoy it because it brings me happiness."

With a second XTERRA world championship title to defend, a full docket of Ironman 70.3s and XTERRAs to compete in, and a fledgling fitness empire to build, 2013 is set to be one of Paterson's biggest years yet. She's recently signed on with a roster of new sponsors, including Scott Bikes, PowerBar and 2XU, and was recently named "Off-Road Athlete of the Year" at the Endurance LIVE Sports Awards. "Is she tired? Of course," says Stokell. "She's always tired, but that's not the point. Once she gets going, she's fine. Do you want to know what it takes to be a world champion? That's what it takes."

It's hard to see any evidence of fatigue in Paterson unless you look very, very closely. At a meeting at 2XU, she has the entire office transfixed as she tries on impossibly tiny race outfits, cracks jokes and dances around the room. When the marketing director steps out of the room, she plops down in a chair and turns to me. "Fuck, I'm tired. Can you tell?" My jaw drops slightly as I explain to her that I'm actually relieved to hear her say that, since after a few days of shadowing her, I was beginning to think she was an alien. She smiles and nods. "Nah, I'm tired." Just then, she's called into the other room for more fittings. She slams her hands down on the desk and jumps up, running into the other room. "I'm coming!" she yells.

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