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FEARLESS FLYER:
WENDY MINOR LOVES
RIDING THE PLUNGE



9 to 5

Wendy Minor

LIFELONG TRAILBLAZER CONQUERS THE DOUBLE

When Wendy Minor moved to Honolulu from rainy Oregon in 1984, she was in for more than just a tropical lifestyle change. The move introduced her to triathlon, and in particular to Ironman racing—and at first blush, she had a conventional reaction.

“I was one of those people who said, ‘Oh, people who do Ironman, they’re nuts.’”

When a woman in Minor’s masters swim class came back from racing Ironman Hawaii on the Big Island and told her how much fun she’d had, Minor remained unconvinced. “I said,

‘How could you have fun for 14 hours?’ It was just beyond me.”

But a seed had been planted, and six months later she did her first short triathlon, followed by a half-Ironman in 1986, where she qualified for Kona. She told herself it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity but there was a problem: “I did it and the minute I crossed the finish line I was like, well, I can do this faster! My once-in-a-lifetime chance keeps multiplying.”

She’s now logged 23 Ironman finishes worldwide, including 11 in Kona, where she took fifth last year in 13:50—her best result since 1993. In addition, this 60-year-old pioneer has now logged two finishes of the infamous double, crossing the line at both Ironman Hawaii and the off-road XTERRA world championship on Maui—two extreme challenges separated by just one week and one inter-island plane flight. This year, she finished Maui in 5:06, claiming a fifth world title in the process.

Minor has always been a pioneer, using her degree in microbiology to open a food and water testing business almost straight out of college at a time—1969—when women struggled to even get credit cards. She says she’d like to retire but her clients keep calling. “I’m an overachiever,” she says. “Everyone in triathlon is an overachiever.”

Minor often finds herself the only woman her age attempting to tackle XTERRA and its infamous descent called the Plunge. “Every year I’m the oldest female,” she says. “Nobody has the slightest interest.”

But Minor loves riding her mountain bike: “I find it just exhilarating. Roaring down the Plunge on Maui, I’m absolutely terrorizing myself. I call it the screaming descent because I’m literally going down there screaming, but I find it to be absolutely a hoot. There are no other women my age who find it that way.”

Don’t expect her to retire from triathlon anytime soon, either: “I love the sport,” she says. “It keeps me young. It’s like a fountain of youth.” —AMY WHITE



{ THE SCIENCE OF SPEED }

“I was a possible winner of Hawaii and in one second I was paralyzed from the waist down. I was thinking, I’ve still got one-third of my body. Don’t worry about the two-thirds that does not walk anymore. I had new goals. My first was to leave the hospital.” —Marc Herremans, a former top pro who has now finished Ironman twice in his wheelchair, at Kona’s Science of Speed

DON KARLE; TIMOTHY CARLSON