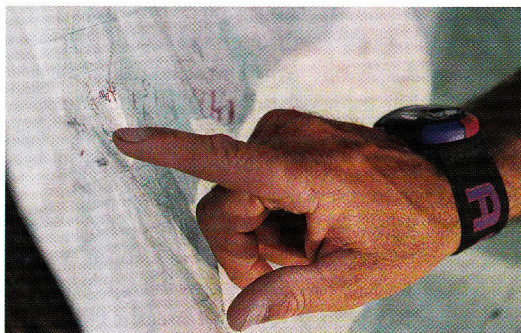


Robyn Benincasa

Benincasa: "I'm structurally sound, good biomechanically, and I don't get blisters."



premier women in the burgeoning sport of adventure racing.

Just six months later, at the first Elf Authentic Adventure, Cathy Sassin would raise the bar again, winning for the first time in a big race (albeit Benincasa was home in San Diego finishing fire fighter school), and helping team Spie Battignoles win the longest adventure race in history, 10 days 22 hours. Her win sets the stage for an interesting Discovery Channel Eco-Challenge 1999—set in Patagonia, Argentina. The pair will race together for the first time with Team Rubicon, including Ian Adamson and Rebecca Rusch. In a sport in which team dynamics are crucial, it remains to be seen how the two, both strong-willed leaders, will fare on the same team. Will they form a dynamic duo, or will they forge a dynamic duel on the same squad?

These two remarkable American women have been inexorably linked in the sport of adventure racing since 1994, when they both competed in a rigorous tryout for the Raid Gauloises, to be held in Borneo. In a controversial decision that some claim was politically driven, Sassin was selected over Benincasa as the sole woman to compete with Team American Pride. Benincasa was chosen as the alternate. Undaunted and driven, Benincasa and some of the other women not selected (Sara O'Dell, Angelica Casteneda, Gail Verway, and Nancy Bristow) formed a team of their own, Team American Pride—Woman. Ironically, at the Borneo Raid Team American Pride disintegrated, and Team American Pride—Woman finished whole. Now, five years later, with first place wins in two major races, the pair is poised for rivalry at the top echelons of the sport for the foreseeable future. And both are planning to race until they drop.

BLISTERS NEED NOT APPLY

Robyn Benincasa, now a self-proclaimed "fire chick," has just finished school—particularly, the San Diego City Fire Fighters Academy, a tough school that culminated in two months of 12-hour days, including daily written examinations. All of this to obtain what she calls "a pretty cool job with one great benefit—it will allow me the flexible time to train and race—something I think I was born to do." She seems to have been born to do a lot of different things. Throw you on your ass, for one. Check out this learning curve: after only three years in the sport, Benincasa became the 1998 US National Judo Champion in her weight category—minus 78 kilos. Says longtime friend Tommy Baynard, an adventure race course setter, ropes rigger, and photographer: "She does judo to break up the monotony of training. She's completely devoted to the entire process of adventure racing. And what helps her to be so successful is that she's funny as hell—she never takes things, or herself, too seriously."

More recently, Benincasa has been taking a hiatus from judo to make more time to train for adventure racing and fire fighting. Clearly a gifted all-around athlete, Benincasa swam and dove at the collegiate level at Arizona State University. She has also been on the Hawaiian Ironman Triathlon age group podium, though the Ironman must now seem like a sprint race by comparison to Raids and Ecos, the 7-10 day wicked stepparents to the triathlon. Asked about her racing prowess, Benincasa is honest but not brash. "My strengths lie in good genetics, mostly," she says. "I'm structurally sound, good biomechanically, and I don't get blisters."

She is also able to push herself through situations, both physically and mentally, that would reduce to a crawl all but the toughest humans on the globe. In Ecuador, at a checkpoint well below the summit of ►