

robyn benincasa

by Brian Metzler

Photos by DiZinno

Five years ago, **Robyn Benincasa** was just like most of the rest of us, working long hours at an 8-to-5 job and struggling to fit in workouts whenever she could.

It wasn't a bad gig — she was flourishing in pharmaceutical sales and bringing home top-five age-group finishes at Ironman triathlons in Hawaii and Canada — but it still wasn't what she really wanted to do.

Benincasa finally decided that eight years of the high heels, suit and pantyhose routine were enough; she wanted to focus more time on her athletic talents. Even if she did get fired for missing work for a race, leaving that job in early 1996 was the best thing that ever happened to her.

Since then, she has given up the triathlon scene to become one of the world's top adventure racers. And she still works for a living, recently being accredited as a full-time firefighter in San Diego, and helping develop Colorado Adventure Training, an adventure racing school she started with long-time teammate Ian Adamson.

Benincasa scoffs at the notion that she's one of the world's top

\$ triathlon \$ adventure racing \$ firefighter \$ judo \$ ultra-running



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female athletes — if not, she's at least one of the most versatile. In 1998, she won a U.S. national judo title in the 78kg weight class after just two years of training in the sport. Recently, she finished her first two ultra-running events and her first ocean kayaking race.

She insists that she's just living the adventurous lifestyle everybody else dreams about.

"I see myself as a jack of all-trades and a master of none," says the 33-year-old. "People say world-class this or world-class that, but I'm just decent at a bunch of things. I don't think that makes me world-class at anything, but it might help make me a better adventure racer."

This past winter, she completed both the Catalina Island 50-mile and 100k trail races. She says she wasn't born to be a runner, which might be true considering her broad shoulders, rippled arms and rock-solid legs. Yet she's run a marathon in 3:18 and was the third female finisher in the Catalina 100k, in 12 hours, 28 minutes.

Not always inclined to be an athlete, one day a 9-year-old Benincasa snagged a fateful scrap of paper as it blew across her family's backyard in New York. It advertised a gymnastics camp and instantly she wanted to go. A star gymnast in high school, she became a standout

springboard diver at Arizona State University. Then, in her mid-20's she carved a niche in triathlon.

Burnt out, or maybe bored, with the weekly grind of triathlon training, Benincasa began searching for something that would tap into her wild side.

She had read about the Raid Gauloises in the early 1990s, and running through jungles, trekking over glaciers, mountain biking through deserts and rafting vicious whitewater rapids, non-stop over the course of a week with little sleep, sounded right up her alley.

"I've always been seeking the sports that best match what I have naturally, both physically and mentally," she says. "I've discovered that races and events of attrition are my thing — the 'last man standing' kind of thing."

Or in this case, the last woman standing. In 1998 she became the first American to win a major adventure race, when she helped Team Salomon/Eco-Internet (then