

# § champion multi-tasker §

§ ocean kayaking § marathon § gymnastics § springboard diving § mountain biking § whitewater rafting



adventure race, doing so in the Raid Gauloises two weeks before Team Vail won the Eco-Challenge. §

racing under the name Salomon/Presidio) triumph at the Raid Gauloises in Ecuador.

Granted, she was racing with the strongest group of adventure racers on the planet — Irishman Robert Nagle, Aussie Adamson and Kiwis John Howard and Steve Gurney — but she more than held her own. In fact, when veteran racers Nagle and Howard were deemed too weary to make it up the final 2,000-foot climb to a checkpoint near the icy summit of the 19,348-foot Cotopaxi volcano, Benincasa was the one who picked up the physical and emotional slack.

"I've completed Ironman with a 104-degree fever, but I've never been as fried in my life as I was going up the volcano," she says. "At that altitude and with that little oxygen, you realize you're slowly dying with each step you take higher."

Competing in adventure races since 1994, Benincasa's transition to the sport wasn't completely smooth. There was a dead-last finish on an all-women's Raid team in 1994, as well as a horrific experience in the 1997 Eco-Challenge in Australia, where illness and injury doomed two male teammates from the start.

On the verge of giving up the sport, she instead wrote a letter to Adamson, who had

captained Eco-Internet to an Eco-Challenge win in 1996, to see if his team had room for another female racer. He had seen her at previous races and was eager to bring her on board. Since then, they've raced several times, including a win in a Hi-Tec Adventure Racing Series event, a fourth-place finish in the 1999 Eco-Challenge with the predominately female Team Rubicon/Atlas, and of course, the '98 Raid.

"One of the reasons Robyn is such a good adventure racer is because she's a very positive person and she has a very even temperament," Adamson says. "She's not someone who's going to freak out or get depressed if something bad happens, and that's as important as how good of an athlete you are."

Certainly, Benincasa is as much brain as she is brawn (she graduated second in her class from Arizona State with a business degree) and she's infinitely modest. Yet her humility might be one of her few faults; those close to her say she's sometimes too humble to realize her own potential.

Her only other glaring weakness could be that she's just too darned busy. She might have been an odds-on favorite for the U.S.

judo team at this summer's Olympics in Sydney, but with everything else she has going on, she didn't have time to train.

"I never see my boyfriend any more," she jokes. "Between the fire station and working out and racing, it's been crazy."

So what's next on the horizon? In April, she competed with Eco-Internet in the Raid Gauloises in Nepal and is planning to compete in the Eco-Challenge in late August. She might also consider the Death Valley Badwater Marathon or perhaps make her first attempt at a 100-mile trail race.

"I'm just normal. I'm a regular ol' chick who likes to do fun stuff," she insists. "Genetically and physically, I'm nothing special. But I've always just believed I could do all this stuff. And now I'm spending my life doing it." 🍌

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