



## TEAM PROFILE

# TEAM EARTHLINK

## CALIFORNIA/HAWAII/OREGON

**RECENT RESULTS** 5th, 2002 Eco-Challenge Fiji; 1st, Cal-Eco Finals Downieville, California; 1st, 2002 Cal-Eco Points Standings; 1st, 2002 Balance Bar 24-Hour Finals, Santa Monica, California; 2nd, 2002 Balance Bar 24-Hour Adventure, Boston; 4th, 2002 Gorge Games/Balance Bar 24-Hour Adventure, Portland; 4th, 2001 Eco-Challenge New Zealand.

**THE PLAYERS** **Jason Middleton, 30**, is a pilot for Sierra Jet, a charter airline service in Bakersfield, California. A former triathlete, he completed the Hawaii Ironman at age 15. Middleton is Earthlink's captain and navigator.

**Robyn Benincasa, 37**, is a San Diego firefighter who has also excelled in diving, triathlon and judo. She has several major wins to her credit, including the Raid Gauloises in 1998, Eco-Challenge Borneo in 2000 and Expedition BVI in 2001.

**Michael Trisler, 35**, is an actor/stuntman and lifeguard who lives in Hawaii. He's

also a former U.S. Army Airborne Ranger and winner of the prestigious Best Ranger Competition. A veteran of four Eco-Challenges, he was a swimmer and water polo player while at West Point.

**Kerry Classen, 30**, is a pro triathlete coming off another solid season in the Xterra off-road triathlon series (6th at USA Championship, 14th at World Championship). Classen, who lives in Bend, Oregon, is a newcomer to the team this year.

**THE SCOOP** Earthlink posted its best season yet, managing a second straight top-five finish at Eco-Challenge. But the experience in Fiji was turbulent, to say the least, so Middleton retooled by adding Classen, one of his best friends since they were in third grade. "He's been getting his feet wet the last couple of years and now he's really ready to jump in," Middleton says. "As the sport is evolving, it's becoming more and more apparent you need to

bring in some really, really good world-class athletes. You need a few people out there that are just hammers." The four-some kicked off their season with a week of team training in San Diego in early February and sensed a cohesiveness the team lacked in previous incarnations. "It's a really good mix," Benincasa says. "They're all like brothers, and I'm their big sister." Aside from Earthlink, the team also gets support from PowerBar and EPX bikes. Check out [www.teamearthlink.com](http://www.teamearthlink.com) for more skinny on the team.

**NOTEWORTHY** An interesting tidbit, Middleton's wife, Tricia, is the race producer for Eco-Challenge. "I met her at a transition area half-way through the race at Eco-Challenge British Columbia (in 1996)," Jason says. "I saw her again at a Hi-Tec race in L.A. and I asked her out. And we've been married going on four years now." The couple is expecting their first child in September, right around the time Subaru Primal Quest will be taking place. Contrary to popular belief, Middleton insists he doesn't have any inside track to top-secret Eco-Challenge information. "No, I don't hear anything," he says. "I wish I did."

**HIGHLIGHTS** In one of the more exciting finishes in multi-sport history, Earthlink edged out Team SoBe by a mere one-hundredth of a second to win the Balance Bar 24-Hour Finals and the \$7,500 prize. At the Cal-Eco finals, Earthlink had a more comfortable margin — more than 90 minutes — as they secured the \$16,000 paycheck for winning both the series and the finals.

**UPCOMING RACES** Look for Earthlink to compete in several of the Cal-Eco series events, Subaru Primal Quest, Eco-Challenge, the Balance Bar 24-Hour Adventure series and possibly one of the Wild Onion urban events.