



"I do it just because I love it, but I also need it to stay alive"

"It was the best thing I've ever done - the buzz goes on today"

## Pat Ratliff - Iron Woman

Pat Ratliff of Pukekohe took up training for ½ marathons and triathlons relatively late in life, culminating by competing in the iconic Ironman event at Taupo.

**What is it that prompts New Zealanders of all ages to get up early, run, cycle and swim for hours, work out in the gym - until their bodies ache? What is it that drives ordinary people to join the ranks of highly toned athletes to perform physical feats that most of us can only watch in wonder from the couch in front of the network news?**

### Franklin elocal asked Pat: "What drives you?"

"I was sports-minded at school, swimming was my top thing and I played netball. I biked to school and ran, but no long distances. My parents were very supportive, and that influenced me a lot. It's a pity there weren't triathlons, because back then I could have realised what I really wanted to do. There was no sport while I was in Auckland doing midwife training and then

I worked in the Outback in Australia as a cook on a buffalo station. That was where I met my husband Colin, who was living in Darwin and came to the station to fish for barramundi. It was lucky that I decided at the last minute to fly home to New Zealand that Christmas with my eldest son Matthew instead of going to Darwin - that was the year Cyclone Tracy hit. Colin was there and was lucky to survive."

Pat and Colin travelled and worked in Australia before returning to New Zealand. "Wherever I could, Matthew and I would get into the sea or a pool to swim."

Still no sign of the enthusiastic athlete who would eventually run an Ironman - but things changed dramatically for Pat at age 41, when she suddenly developed Type One diabetes. "I had started going to the gym when we got back to New Zealand, where I went back to midwifery," recalls Pat. "But when I developed diabetes, I had to really exercise regularly, pushing myself a little bit more every day. My sister asked me to join a team for a triathlon - I was to do the swim. I swam the 1500m and the minute I got out of the water I was so fired up! I just wanted to jump on the bike and go! So I bought a bike for duathlons and that winter moved on from sprint to Olympic distances. I went to Taupo Ironman every year to support local people and as soon as I saw it, I knew I could do it too."

Pat was on a mission - to find out if a diabetic could compete. A full year's training with coach John Ackland (who was with the America's Cup team in Valencia), and Pat was ready for the 2004 Ironman.

"It was the best thing I've ever done - the buzz still goes on today. John knew the level of training required for each age group and worked out a programme for me. I had been on injections, but by using an insulin pump I could take part. Running was always going to be a challenge, but I knew I could do the distance. John said to "pace yourself," but I was so fired up I did the fastest swim of my life. I tried to slow down, but had so much energy!

"I had to do blood tests all day and set it up so I could do tests on the bike. I had to carry extra stuff, but it was important. I handed in my pump before the swim and was so nervous that it would get lost. That would have been the end of my day. It was such a good feeling running that last 100 metres to the finish. Ironman is something I'll never forget."

Pat still trains every day and joins teams for events. The regular exercise has made a positive difference to controlling her diabetes.

"I do it just because I love it, but I also need it to stay alive," she says.



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