



Mildura Weekly

# SPORT

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## From puff to tough!

- **RUNAWAY SUCCESS:** Cath Hall is one determined young woman...overcoming severe asthma to compete in ultra-distance sporting challenges, including gruelling Ironman events...raising money for her favourite charity along the way. Her story is on Page 74.

Mildura could well be marketed as an asthma-friendly zone, with our climate doing a lot to alleviate the condition of sufferers. That's certainly been the case for one relative newcomer. The Mildura Weekly's ALAN ERSKINE reports on a good sport who has her sights on...

# Mission Ironman!

TEN years ago, Catherine Hall couldn't run 50 metres, or climb a few flights of stairs without running short of breath, puffing and gasping for air because of an asthma condition.

Then she moved to the warm, dry climate of Mildura, got hold of a medico who put her onto good preventative medication...and now there's no holding her back.

Cath, 34, can't get enough of swimming, bike riding and running, competed in her first Ironman competition four years ago, and now has her sights set on a new Personal Best at a second event, the Busselton, WA, Ironman competition on Sunday, December 5.

Cath has vivid memories of her first ultra-distance event, the Port Macquarie Ironman (formerly Forster). It starts with a 3.8 kilometre swim, is followed by a 180 kilometre bike ride, and finishes off with a full marathon - a 42.2 kilometre run.

She completed the event in 16 hours and 24 minutes. The cut-off is 17 hours. That's when race organisers pick up any 'stragglers' and transport them to the recovery area.

Cath says she was very happy just to finish under the time limit, considering she completed with a training injury...a stress fracture of her left foot, along with a chest infection...and says she is aiming to shave at least an hour or more off her 2006 race time. "My goal time is actually 14 hours," she said.

Cath has been planning for the 2010 event for several months, not just with a dedicated training regime, but also spreading the word about her favourite charity, the John Maclean Foundation, in the hope of using the Ironman event to raise as much money as she can for the cause.

She says her move to Mildura just on nine years ago had opened up a whole new world as far as her health was concerned.



Sydney-born, she is a long-time severe sufferer of exercise-induced asthma, and growing up and later working in wet, humid climates - both in Australia and overseas - had an adverse affect on her health, especially when she attempted any form of strenuous exercise.

It was a condition she put up with, trying to control it to some extent with the puffer - a Ventolin inhaler, while studying for a degree in environmental science, firstly in Warmambool, then going for her Honors Degree after moving to Brisbane, furthering her career by completing her PhD in New Zealand, and then working as a researcher in California. Her condition wasn't helped when she developed whooping cough while living in NZ, further damaging her lungs.

At that time exercise was difficult, especially after suffering a broken ankle that required reconstructive surgery, and an unrelated knee injury.

Cath said that in later years, improvements in asthma medication allowed her to do some exercise, gradually increasing to the stage where she was able to compete in

ultra-distance cycling events.

After moving back to Australia, she says her best move was coming to live in the dry climate of Mildura, where she noticed an immediate change in her condition, especially with great advice and treatment from her new medico.

"This led to a massive improvement in my asthma, allowing me to start running without the need to take my inhaler," she said.

"Now I don't have any trouble at all in doing all the swimming, riding and running I want. I no longer have any problems with the long distance stuff, and that's why I have my sights set on the Ironman competition."

Cath admits that with the change to her health since Mildura, she is making up for lost time, not only in the sporting arena, but enjoying many other outdoor recreational activities, such as camping and fishing...and she can also work on her home renovations without any distress. She also took part in the recent corporate challenge held by Mildura Rowing Club to introduce new people to the sport...and says that's been a lot of fun...so far.

Cath also doesn't have any problems working outdoors in her position as a biodiversity officer with Mildura Rural City Council, a position she has held for the past four years, after a short stint with the Murray Darling Freshwater Research Laboratory.

Cath said that for as long as she could remember, she has harboured a soft spot for the John Maclean Foundation, which had an emphasis on helping wheelchair-bound youngsters achieve some of their goals in life.

**FOOTNOTE:** Cath said Mildura Weekly readers who want to support her in her quest to raise money for the John Maclean Foundation can contact her on 0409980700. Her web page is [www.ironman-charitychallenge.com.au/cath\\_hall](http://www.ironman-charitychallenge.com.au/cath_hall)



• TOUGHING IT OUT: Catherine Hall, pictured during last year's Shapparton half-Ironman triathlon, and ABOVE LEFT - during a break from her work as a biodiversity officer with Mildura Rural City Council. The 34-year-old is one of many asthma sufferers who find the Mildura climate more suitable for exercise and other strenuous activities.