



"In some ways an hour time trial is like my fantasy," says former world record holder Molly Shaffer Van Houweling.

**STORIES**

# She Did It First

Last September, Molly Shaffer Van Houweling, 43, became the first woman in 12 years to break the World Hour Record, setting a standard for Bridie O'Donnell and Evelyn Stevens to tackle a few months later. Here's how the UC Berkeley law professor and associate dean came out of nowhere to crush it. **BY JEN SEE**

**You were the first woman to break the hour record after the UCI rule change allowing time trial bikes. How important was it for you to set the benchmark?**

It was exciting to be first, and of course it meant I didn't have to go as far! It was fun to be part of the excitement about the hour record during that year or so when first Jens Voigt and then ultimately Bradley Wiggins went after it.

**What gave you the idea?**

When the UCI announced the rule change in May 2014, my husband, Rob, said, "This is the event for you." I continued focusing on road racing, but just as the season was ending,

Jens made his attempt. "What would Jens do?" is one of my mottos. Around the same time, Rob gave me a Cervélo T4 track bike, a back-to-school present.

**Pretty nice back-to-school present.**

As a matter of fact, a present is how my racing career started. When we were in graduate school, Rob purchased a road bike for me—he saw a flyer advertising a bike and thought it was my size. It was the same story: I have this bike, I guess I have to learn how to ride it!

**One of your strengths is aerodynamics—how have you developed that?**

In 2007, a few years into my

racing career, I was a decent time trialist—in 2006, I'd placed third in our Northern California-Nevada district time trial, 90 seconds behind the winner—but I felt like I hadn't lived up to my potential. As a birthday present, Rob sent me to the San Diego low-speed wind tunnel. At the time I thought it was ridiculous. I was a recreational rider and to do something that I associated with ProTour people seemed fraudulent, like I was an imposter. But I was game. The most dramatic thing we learned was how much difference head position made. That year, I won the district time trial championship on about the same power, going 90 seconds faster

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using the things I learned in the wind tunnel.

## How do you train to hold an aero position for an hour?

Being on the time-trial bike resembles the plank position, and that's part of my core work. I was a synchronized swimmer from seventh grade through college, and I wonder if that gives me an advantage in terms of being able to hold a strange position.

## Do you have a race playlist?

No, but I make up mantras that coordinate with the songs that get stuck in my head, like “Get

Up!” by Caitlin Canty. This song is good because I can think, “Ease up, ease up, ease up,” or I can think, “pick it up, pick it up, pick it up.”

## What's your secret to balancing the demands of your job with your training?

As full-time professional jobs go, mine is more flexible than many. I know that I'm happier living a life that has multiple components: not just going to work, but making time for my workout or my recovery. It is sometimes a challenge to figure out when am I going to eat. This morning, I had an

early conference call. I put something in the rice cooker before I showered, then tossed it into Tupperware so I could have breakfast during the call.

## You were in Colorado for Evie's attempt. What was it like to watch her?

It was genuinely exciting and not too hard for my ego to take. I had come to terms with the fact that records are made to be broken when Bridie broke mine in January!

## Think you could go farther?

I do. That's the beauty of the record—each time it's extended it makes you think that what didn't seem possible is possible after all. That said, what Evie did might be impossible for me! For now I'm just racing on the road and spending time on the track. I'm not prejudging what the future might bring.



## UCI WOMEN'S HOUR RECORD, 2003-2016

### OCTOBER 2003

Leontien Zijlaard-Van Moorsel  
Netherlands

46.065 km [28.62 mi]

### SEPTEMBER 2015

Molly Shaffer Van Houweling  
United States

46.273 km [28.75 mi]

### JANUARY 2016

Bridie O'Donnell  
Australia

46.882 km [29.13 mi]

### FEBRUARY 2016

Evelyn Stevens  
United States

47.980 km [29.81 mi]