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XTERRA

"Hesitation & Devastation"

South African **STRONGMAN**

By Cameron Elford
Photos by Rich Cruse

Conrad Stoltz is one of the sport's most versatile, and talented, athletes



SINCE 1988, SOUTH AFRICA'S CONRAD STOLTZ HAS BEEN A DRIVING FORCE IN MULTISPORT, FIRST AS A JUNIOR DUATHLETE THEN, LATER, AS AN OLYMPIAN, NON-DRAFTING SHORT-COURSE STAR AND XTERRA WORLD CHAMPION. This season, Stoltz, 31, again has his sights set on the XTERRA world tour, which will be capped by the world championships October 23 in Maui, where Stoltz will seek his third title after thumping the fields in 2001 and 2002 before succumbing to the punishing lava rocks and kiawe thorns with five flats in 2003 and a broken pedal in 2004.

Indeed, 2004 was a tough year for Stoltz, who DNFed at the

Olympics, when a broken seatpost scuttled his Athens race.

"As I shifted to the small [chainring] to tackle the main climb," says Stoltz of his Athens race, "I was in a corner and was pouring the pressure on the pedals as the chain dropped; 180 pounds and 500-plus watts on the pedals suddenly got transferred to the nose of saddle." After running frantically to a nearby tech-support station, only to find nothing but spare wheels, Stoltz watched from the sidelines as New Zealand's Hamish Carter led a Kiwi one-two Athens finish.

Still, despite a challenging 2004, Stoltz is throwing himself at 2005, making up for lost time with a first-place finish at XTERRA South

Africa on April 24. In addition, the articulate and talented South African is quick to shrug off his 2004 misfortunes, referring to them jokingly as "365 days of bad-luck-ology," rather than allowing the hard luck to erode his confidence.

"Conrad is extremely versatile and has very few weaknesses," notes 2001 Ironman USA Lake Placid champ and former pro cyclist Steve Larsen. "I had to pretty much dominate in at least one discipline; Conrad has the ability to win even when he is not at his very best because he is so strong in all three sports." Larsen, Stoltz's onetime XTERRA rival, now occasionally trains with the powerful South African.

Triathlete magazine caught up with Stoltz in early May as he shifted his summer training base from Stellenbosch, near Cape Town in South Africa, to Bend, Ore.

Triathlete: Conrad, what initially attracted you to multisport?

Conrad Stoltz: At primary school [in Pretoria] I did all the sports I could: rugby, cricket, tennis, judo, track, cross-country and BMX racing. When I was 13 I took up swimming and competed in modern biathlon, which quickly became boring (I didn't like sitting in the stands waiting hours to swim a 100m). So when I went to high school at 14, I got . . . a bike for my birthday and immediately started triathlon.

From my very first triathlon I was hooked. None of the other sports had the sense of adventure or the challenge. My dad and I trained and raced together, and my mom became involved in the federation (and is currently president of the African Triathlon Federation), so it was a family thing.

At my first triathlon I got a flat about a mile from the finish, so I ran with my bike on my back, as I was worried I'd damage the rim if I pushed the bike with a flat. I finished 27th, but couldn't wait for the next event, which I won.

T: How did you move into the next phase, from amateur to aspiring professional?

CS: When I finished high school, I got an invitation from fellow South African triathlete Kevin Richards, packed my bags and went racing for a club in France. I continued racing in France for six seasons, returning to South Africa in our summer, where I would race the South African season as well.

So in six years I raced 12 seasons. I remember one year I raced 35 races in one season. I didn't have a coach and trained hard all the time . . . because of inexperience I was constantly injured and never finished the season in one piece.

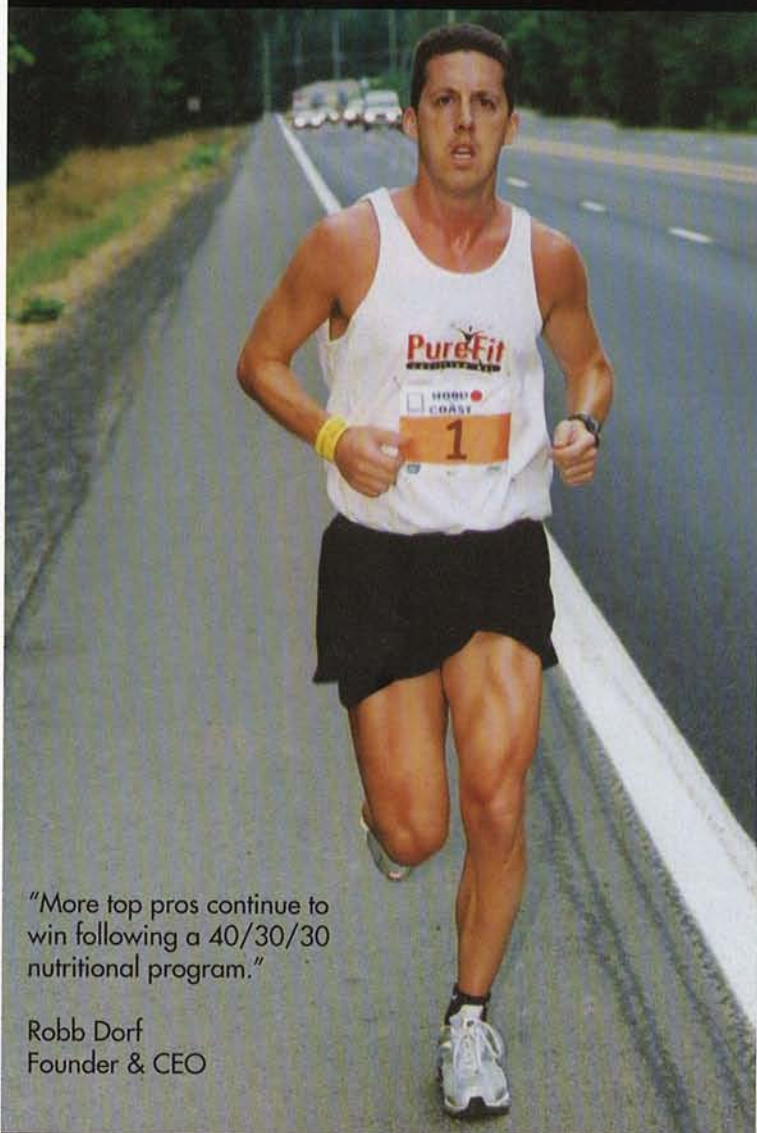
T: When did you begin to take a longer-term approach to the sport and look at it as a career?

CS: I thought the prize money was good, but after a typical season I would maybe buy a new bike, or a set of racing wheels, and the money I saved would be gone. I'd arrive at my parents' house after a long, hard season of racing overseas, and I'd have nothing but a bag full of dirty clothing . . . [plus] an injury or two.

So after a few years of that my dad pulled me aside and said, "If you don't start making a living from this sport soon, you'd have to go study or work, or do something." So that was a tough time for me. I was 110 percent into the training and the racing, but as a shy loner who loves the outdoors, and with English being my second language [after Afrikaans], I hated calling companies, asking for sponsorship, pushing my resume, talking business. It felt like I always pulled at the short end.

Sponsorship in South Africa is very tough. Triathlon is a white elitist sport, and South Africa is a third-world country with very serious

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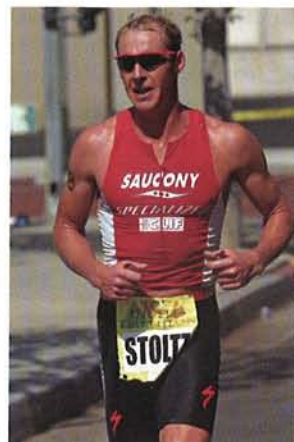
Displaying remarkable versatility, Stoltz has twice made his national Olympic team while also excelling at non-drafting events. Still, the powerful South African's forte remains XTERRA.



issues like poverty and crime and kids living on the streets, so few people took this young boy who wants sponsorship so that he can swim, ride his bike and run for a living seriously.

T: How is it different for you now?

CS: The U.S. has really been the land of opportunity for me. I make a fair living, and by buying property wisely in South Africa (I can't really afford the U.S.) I should come out ahead when I retire. I have had good agents and good sponsorship for which I'm very thankful. Of course, a world title or two doesn't hurt.



T: Tell me a bit about your training. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What have you done to become such a versatile athlete?

CS: I'm a diesel engine. I can turn out big power for a long time at a low heart rate. At the lab where they test prospective Olympians I had, in 2000, the record for the highest peak power on the bike at 512 watts. The lab tech said, "That's better than any of the cyclists we've had—even with their 'help.'" I weigh 185 pounds at 6-foot-2, so despite the power, steep, sustained climbing is not my thing. Fortunately my downhill skills make up for some of it.

Hill repeats have helped my running more than any other session. I do anything from 4 x 5 minutes just below or at AT to 10 x 90 seconds hard. I also do a weekly technical mountain-bike ride, where I work on skills... with downhillers or World Cup champion Christoph Sauser (who trains in Stellenbosch every year) and we find something scary, have a good look at it and then spend about an hour riding it progressively faster. We have a saying: "If there is no blood, it was not a ride." Normally I'm the one bleeding.

T: What are your training and racing plans this season?

CS: This year I have put everything into XTERRA. I'll do some non-drafting road tris [including late-season classics Chicago and L.A.] as preparation for XTERRA. I want to reclaim the XTERRA titles: USA and worlds [in Maui]. I bumped my [weekly] bike mileage from 10 to 16 hours, cut the swim volume and in the weight room I performed small miracles (in my opinion, at least). Plus, in the past my road bike would be set up with a forward position and aerobars, but this year, everything is MTB specific: saddle way back and no aerobars. Plus I raced the Cape Epic in South Africa [where Stoltz finished 13th out of a field of more than 250 starters]: 900k of mountain biking over eight days with 16k of vertical gain. It was an amazing experience, and I know the 36 hours I rode will come in handy somewhere this season.

T: Tell me about the 2004 Olympics? Was it frustrating to be sidelined by a mechanical problem?

CS: The reason I went for Athens was because people said, "It is Conrad's course." If it had been the usual flat course I wouldn't have been interested. My swim and run are not good enough to win, and with the bike being draft-legal, I would need a special course to get away. Well that course was special. The steepest part was 21 percent. I had a 36-tooth chainring with a 27 cog at the back, and still I stood on the pedals, wrestling the bars just to get up.

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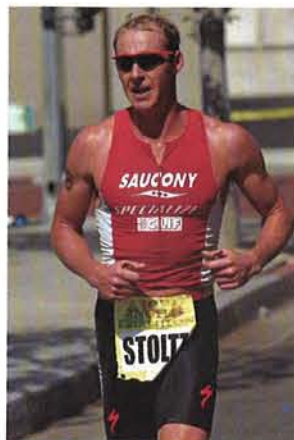
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THE TRUTH ABOUT HYPONATREMIA [PG. 26]

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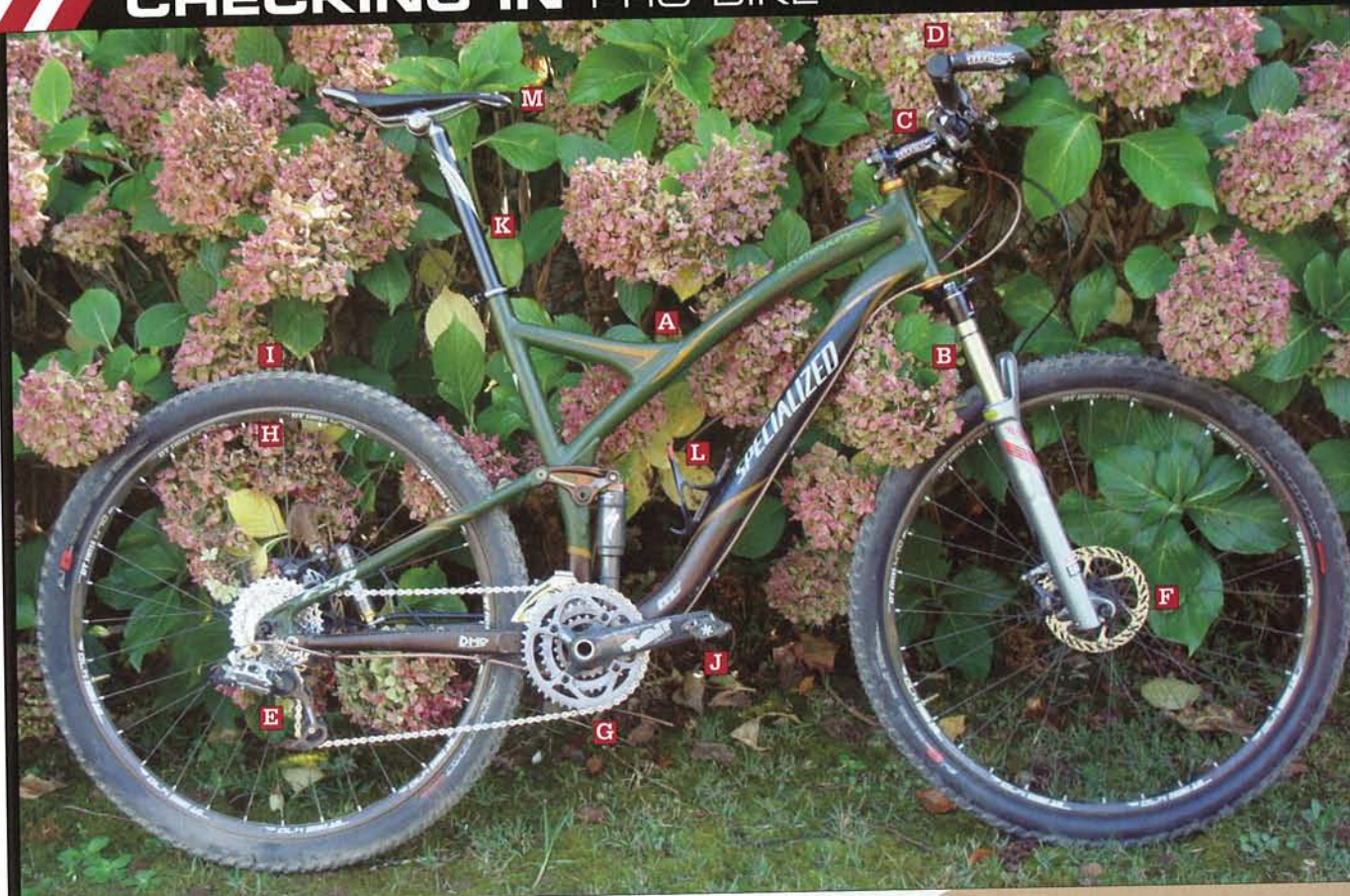
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Conrad Stoltz' Specialized Stumpjumper 29

By Jay Prasuhn



In observance of our off-road issue, we deemed it fitting to analyze the reigning XTERRA world champ's rig. That would be Conrad Stoltz, the first pro

to switch to a big-wheeled 29er, which he debuted on his quest for the European, American and World XTERRA titles in 2008. "I'm very excited to prove all the ranting 29er critics out there wrong," he says. "I'm passionate about how the bike rides and how I feel on it."

The king of prototyping, the Caveman has been one of best product testers for mountain-bike companies, having done everything from bash Specialized tires and frames to evaluate early RockShox Reba protos.

While the existing 29er frame is shown and ridden stock in training, Stoltz' new race-day chassis will be worth checking out. "Specialized is making me a special race frame, replacing the bottom bracket shell with one that will take the new Specialized crankset, which saves close to 200 grams," he says. "They'll also make some small tweaks on the frame to get it lighter, like light paint."

While the industry still sits on the fence about how far to delve into 29ers, Stoltz is committed and hopes to see others experiencing the benefit of the bigger tires, which Conrad claims carry obstacles better. If they continue to build steam, Specialized might have a carbon fiber 29er for racing in the near future. We (and especially Stoltz) can only hope. ▲

- A Frame** Specialized Stumpjumper 29, size XL
- B Fork** prototype RockShox Reba 29er Race 100mm
- C Headset** Cane Creek Lanusse, 1 1/8"
- D Handlebar** Titec Pluto flat bar, Titec Pluto stem, Titec bar-ends
- E Groupset** SRAM X.0 9-speed, 11-34 cassette,
- F Brakes** Avid Juicy Ultimate 7
- G Chainring** TruVativ Noir, 175 crankarms, 44-32-22, Bikinventions Squirt Dry Lube
- H Wheels** DT Swiss 470 sl with Specialized Stout front hub and over-size quick release (training wheels)
- I Tires** Specialized The Captain 2.00, 1 cup of Stans No Flat (will race most Xterras on Flat Trak LK 2.00)
- J Pedals** Time ATAC Ti carbon
- K Seat Post** Specialized 30.9mm
- L Hydration** Campagnolo Record bottle cages
- M Saddle** Serfas DD Pro
- N Travel Case** Cardboard box (the airlines lowered their luggage allowances again—25 kilograms in South Africa, Stoltz adds)

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