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Triathlete

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TRIATHLETES OF THE YEAR

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TOP SHORT-COURERS
**GREG AND
LAURA BENNETT**

Specialized S-Works Transition



The '08 S-Works Transition retails at \$8,500 with Zipp 404 carbon clinchers, Zipp Vuka aerobar and a SRAM Force groupset. The frame module (frameset, post and crankset) will retail at \$3,500.

Courtesy the manufacturer

By Jay Prasuhn

The 2008 Specialized Transition marks a striking new direction for Specialized. For years, the company has made great aluminum bikes, but triathletes have, over the past several seasons, increasingly focused on carbon. So Specialized started from scratch and took the tri bike to the front of the company's lengthy to-do list. The result—the 2008 S-Works Transition—has thrust Specialized to the top of the tri market inside a year. With the Transition not only does Specialized have a bike of a) carbon; b) amazing geometric variability; and c) striking aerodynamic merit; but they also have d) an Ironman world title on it, courtesy Australia's Chris McCormack.

Visual accents on this barely UCI legal-rig include a curved seat-tube fairing the rear wheel and unique stays that ride the rear wheel in parallel, flaring at the back to meet the dropouts. Add internally routed cables and unique brake calipers (using a brake cable that pulls the calipers equally from the center of a straddle wire) tucked neatly out of the wind, a blade-thin top tube, a 1-inch steerer and my favorite feature, a fork crown cut on an aero bias, and the bike demonstrates the engineers were thinking outside the box in the interest of aerodynamics. And a recent test at the Wright Brothers low-speed wind tunnel at MIT showed the Transition scoring well enough on its aerodynamic torture test to place it among the very top industry performers.

And the fit range is unbelievable. The Transition is sized S through XL but adopts elements of Dan Empfield's Stack and Reach fitting, taking into account not only the rider's inseam but also upper-body reach. Additionally, S-Works buyers have the option of a zero-offset post or a layback, with each post having two clamp positions. So on a medium frame with a nominal saddle height of 75cm, the bike can have a seat angle as far back as 74 degrees or as steep as 78 degrees with the layback post. Switch to the zero offset and you go from 78.5 to an astounding 82.5 degrees.

We garnered the most feedback while racing the large (56cm) Transition at a Half Ironman in late October. First

thoughts? With a great fit, narrow profile and all cables ported away, it cuts a narrow swath. With much less training in my legs (exposed by a horrendous run), I managed a three-minute-faster bike split over 56 miles than I did on the same course under similar conditions two years prior—for what that's worth.

The integrated brakes had commendable stopping power on descents or entering corners. Smart carbon layup meant for a stiff bottom bracket (a surprise considering the narrow stance of the rear stays) with no spoke rub on the stays no matter how hard I wrenched on climbs. And the front-end stiffness was a match. The leaf gussets flanking the down tube at the fork serve a structural as well as aerodynamic function, helping drop torsional flex when climbing or steering.

So while the slack 72-degree head angle should have, in theory, made the bike a more sluggish handler, front-end stiffness brought the snappiness right back. The Transition was stiff accelerating out of U-turns, but the slack head angle (coupled with a low bottom bracket that drops the center of gravity) helped the Transition maintain a straight line when I fatigued and my bike handling got sloppy.

Not to be lost in the fawning over the bike is a stunning S-Works crankset. Hollow crankarms joined by a jagged Hirth coupling interface make for a stout crank that complements the frame's drivetrain. Not only is the crank a featherweight at 635 grams but it's also unbelievably stiff, and an interchangeable spider allows for either standard or compact rings. Additionally, the Specialized rings are Ni-Boron coated, hardening the rings and giving them a champagne finish. We found this helps shifting to the big blade with significantly less delay and grinding.

One final note: While the S-Works was impressive, we're rapt with the entire range. While all Transition models below the S-Works have a slight frame weight increase due to a different carbon layup (and consumers get a choice of one post instead of both), the buyer spending \$3,000 on the Transition Comp gets a bike very similar to that on which Macca won Hawaii. Doesn't get much better than that. ▲

TRIATHLETES OF THE YEAR

Our take on the best of the best over the past 12 months of racing

By the editors

We will likely look back at 2007 as a year when the sport of triathlon made a big, explosive step forward. In North America alone, the Life Time Fitness Series, ITU World Cups, Ironman, XTERRA and the upward spiraling growth of the half-Ironman distance and 70.3 series underwent dramatic expansion both in terms of participation and money. Below, we've selected what we feel are the top performers in the sport over the past 12 months. We'd like to hear from you on the matter. Please go to triathletemag.com and e-mail us your thoughts.

Overall: The best of the best

Chris McCormack AUSTRALIA

Chris McCormack's first win at the Ford Ironman World Championship in Hawaii in October may, at least thus far, be the high-water mark of his extraordinary career, but the talented Aussie won seven races altogether in 2007, including 70.3 races Baja and Honu, Quelle Challenge Roth, Memphis in May and the Silverman Half.

His Hawaii Ironman win, of course, was the biggie and came at a time when he was seriously questioning if Kona would forever elude him. Considering he's been collecting Ironman Australia and Quelle Challenge wins like a kid collecting bubble-gum cards, the drama grew around his crash-and-burn attempts in the lava fields.

Over the years of his Ironman pursuit, McCormack was transformed from cocky speedster to a humble veteran and great champion. For that, as much as for his tremendous results this season, he is our men's overall triathlete of the year.

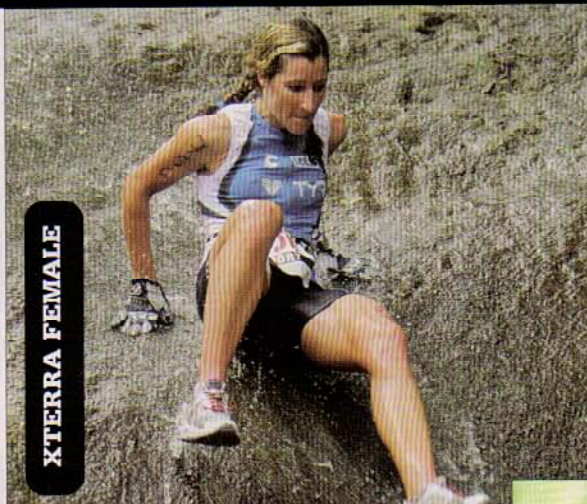


John Sogetta/wahoomeia.com

XTERRA athletes of the year

Jamie Whitmore USA

With more than 30 career victories to her credit, in 2007 Whitmore claimed the XTERRA U.S. national championship at Lake Tahoe, XTERRA Southeast champs in Alabama, XTERRA Mountain champs in Utah and XTERRA East champs in Richmond and third place at XTERRA worlds in Maui. Whitmore continues to reign as perhaps the best women's off-road triathlete in the history of the sport.



XTERRA FEMALE

Laura Bennett AUSTRALIA

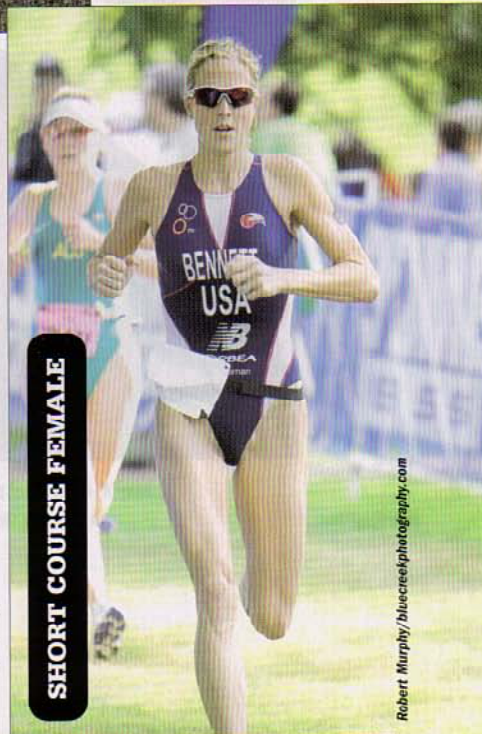
While Greg was racing all over the United States, the other half of Team Bennett was traveling the globe on the World Cup circuit and posting some pretty impressive finishes. She spent most of the summer chasing Vanessa Fernandes and Emma Snowsill, but Bennett came through when it

Rich Cruse

Conrad Stoltz SOUTH AFRICA

Stoltz blasted through 2007, accumulating XTERRA victories in South Africa, Temecula, Alabama, Virginia, Utah and Lake Tahoe. In addition—and most impressively—Stoltz won his third XTERRA world title, in Maui. “I’ve raced Olivier [Marceau] many, many times over the last 15 years, and never have I even come close to outrunning him,” wrote Stoltz on his blog following his Maui win. “So I told myself, ‘Pucker up, this is going to be the toughest run of your life.’” Stoltz is our undisputed men’s pick for XTERRA triathlete of the year.

mattered most. She earned a cool \$250,000 with her win at the HyVee Des Moines World Cup, out-running some of the fastest women in the world on a sweltering day. Getting paid is good, but the highlight of Bennett’s season came at the Beijing World Cup, where she finished third overall and was the top American, earning the first spot on the 2008 Olympic Team. Stepping up at the big races and competing alongside the best in the world is why Laura Bennett is our short-course triathlete of the year.



SHORT COURSE FEMALE

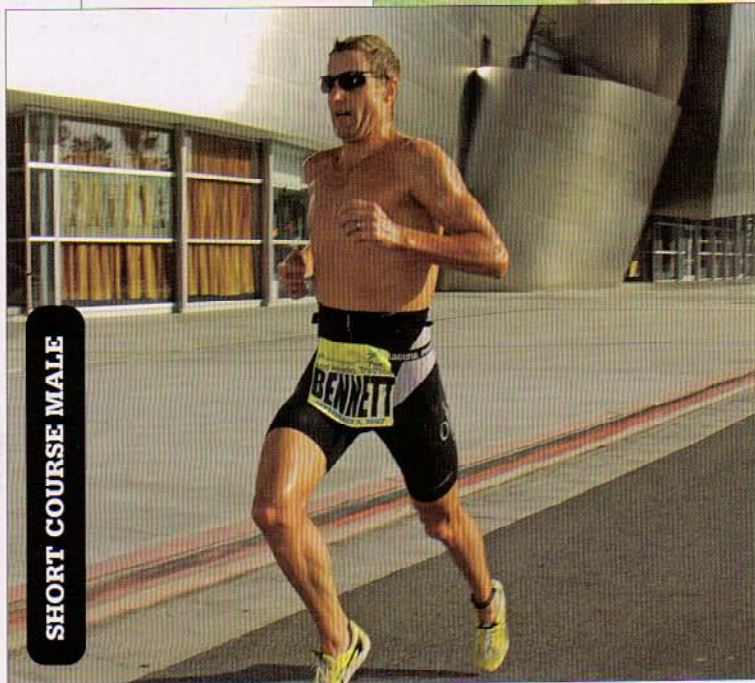
Robert Murphy/blucreephotography.com

Short course athletes of the year

Greg Bennett AUSTRALIA

You don’t cash in on over \$400,000 in one season by sitting

on the sidelines. The male half of the sport’s fastest and now richest couple set his sights on the Life Time Fitness Series this year and swept all five races against stiff competition. Bennett was dominant in all five events, his only close call coming at the Los Angeles Triathlon, where he had to run down his friend and countryman Craig Walton in the final mile. This set the stage for the inaugural Toyota U.S. Open Championship, in Dallas, where a win would give Bennett an unprecedented \$420,000 payday. The Aussie usually waits until the run to make his big move, but in Dallas he put the hammer down from the start en route to a 1:44:41 finish and the biggest win of his career. Five wins at five of the biggest races on U.S. soil are what make Greg Bennett our short-course triathlete of the year.



SHORT COURSE MALE

Rich Cruse

Rich Cruse