

## CHERYL WEBB



**Cheryl in action in the 2005 (2<sup>nd</sup> in 1:35:14) and 2008 Winter (1<sup>st</sup> in 1:34:58) Australian 20 km championships**

If I had to choose one walker as the outstanding walker of the Australian 2009 Summer 20 km championships, it would have to be Cheryl Webb. Cheryl, born 3 October 1976 and now 32 years of age, is walking faster than ever and has now cemented a place at the top of the Australian racewalking tree. For her, it has been a long climb to the top, starting in the early nineties with a number of strong performances as an under-age athlete.

She was a consistent medallist in the Under 18 ranks, winning medals in the 8 km roadwalking title for 5 years in a row:

1990	Jane Saville	NSW	40:49	Jane Beecroft	VIC	41:11	Cheryl Webb	NSW	41:12
1991	Cheryl Webb	NSW	40:25	Nat Davison	VIC	41:20	Jo Strangman	ACT	42:17
1992	Jane Saville	NSW	39:15	Cheryl Webb	NSW	39.25	Jo Strangman	ACT	40.13
1993	Cheryl Webb	NSW	39:22	Natalie Saville	NSW	40.46	Jenny Crooks	SA	40.55
1994	Cheryl Webb	NSW	40:30	Melissa Scott	VIC	42:20	Tracey Rosengrave	VIC	42:51

She also medalled consistently in the Under 20 ranks, culminating in gold in 1995.

1992-93 Aust. Junior T & F Champs	5,000 metres Walk	3	24:30
1993 Aust. Junior Walking Champs	10 km Walk	2	49:25
1995 Aust. Junior Walking Champs	10 km Walk	1	51:13
1996 Aust. Junior Walking Champs	10 km Walk	2	48:56

Once she hit the senior ranks in 1997, she had to compete against the likes of Kerry Saxby-Junna, Jane and Natalie Saville, Simone Wolowiec, Wendy Muldoon and Lisa Paolini and it was a hard grind year by year as she lowered her times and reduced the gap.

She just missed selection for the 2000 Olympics, being the fourth Australian to finish in the Australian 20 km championship and official Olympic trial, held in Homebush in February 2000. The first 10 in the race read as follows

1.	Alfridi, Erica	ITA	1:30:06
2.	Perrone, Elisabetta	ITA	1:30:36
3.	Saville, Jane	AIS	1:30:58
4.	Saxby-Junna, Kerry	AIS	1:33:51
5.	Paolini, Lisa	NSW	1:34:35
6.	Webb, Cheryl	NSW	1:36:14
7.	Fang, Yuan Yu	MAS	1:36:14
8.	Wolowiec, Simone	VIS	1:40:06
9.	Kara-Ali, Lara	SAU	1:45:27
10.	Muldoon, Wendy	VIC	1:46:10

Her time of 1:36:14 was well within the required Olympic standard but Jane Saville, Kerry Saxby-Junna and Lisa Paolini had finished ahead of her.

It would be a further Olympic cycle before things fell her way. A second place in the 2004 Australian 20 km roadwalking championship in a PB time of 1:34:36 was the first step as it gained her selection in the Australian team to compete in the 2004 Racewalking World Cup in Naumburg. It was the start of a productive three years of international representations.

Her performance in Naumburg, where she finished in 26<sup>th</sup> place in a huge PB of 1:31:43, broke the Olympic A qualifier, took her to number four on the Australian all time list and cemented her long awaited Olympic selection. She followed this with selections to the 2005 World Championships in Helsinki and the 2006 Commonwealth Games and Racewalking World Cup. Her international performances at these major championships read as follows and show great consistency.

2004 Race Walking World Cup	20 km Walk	26/100	26th	1:31:43
2004 Olympic Games	20 km Walk	38/57	38th	1:37:40
2005 World Championships	20 km Walk	21/47	21st	1:33:58
2006 Commonwealth Games	20 km Walk	3/9	3rd	1:36:03
2006 Race Walking World Cup	20 km Walk	37/88	37th	1:36:33

Over the last few years, although Cheryl continued to race, the major international berths eluded her. It was not until August 2008 that she started to show indications of her previous form in winning the Australian Winter 20 km championship in a good 1:34:58. A great summer followed as she reduced her 5000m track walk time to 21:19 and it was therefore not surprising when she won the 2009 Australian Summer 20 km title in a huge PB time of 1:29:44. Cheryl's comments after the event, as quoted on the Athletics Australia website, sum up what the win and the time meant to her.

*"I set out to break 90 minutes today, which was a big ask when my old pb was 91:43 back in 2004. Last year I was on the verge of quitting but in the end I simply said to myself – either have a real go at it or give it away. I have been in the sport for 25 years. I started walking when I was six so I didn't see any point in going on unless I was going to be serious. I got a lot of support from my family, and now I am really thinking about another four years. Certainly up to the Commonwealth Games next year and then I will think about going on again. This is just great."*

Cheryl has now secured a berth to her second World Championships and we look forward to seeing her improve her time and her international ranking even further in Berlin.