

Frank Bertei

2002	Racewalking World Cup	Turin	50 km	47 th	4:20:26
2004	Racewalking World Cup	Naumburg	50 km	40 th	4:21:22

Born on 19th March 1966 in New Zealand, Frank Bertei moved to Australia when his father's employer relocated him and his family. Initially a cyclist, Frank was a late starter in racewalking. It was only after travelling with his wife Celia (who was a very good walker in her own right) that Frank decided to take up walking as his major sport and he joined the Nunawading club in 1989 as a 23 year old.

The next couple of years were largely track oriented and his first taste of major competition came when he was selected to compete in the 20 km event in the 8 Nations Trip that Harry Summers organised in 1991. His time of **1:36:07** was a good introduction to the longer events. He also walked his first Canberra 20 mile that year, finishing in **2:44:05**.

By 1993, he had improved his track times to **12:42** for 3000m and **21:34** for 5000m and that year he was also part of the Proclamation Park team that won the Canberra 20 Mile Teams event, beating the VRWC team by 1 point. Paul Copeland was 2nd in 2:29:35, Mike Harvey was 3rd in 2:31:18 and Frank was 10th in **2:48:39**

Frank's progress through the ranks was steady during the mid nineties and he further improved his best times to **12:34** for 3000m (1994), **46:41** for 10,000m (1995) and **1:35:16** for 20 km (1995).

In 1996, he walked his first 50 km event and finished in a creditable time of **4:30:39**. But from then on, his enthusiasm seemed to diminish and his performances stagnated as he mixed walking, running and cycling and generally pursued other priorities.

It was not until after the 2000 Olympics that Frank regained his enthusiasm for walking and started to train with Paul van Koppen who was back competing and coaching after a break of some years. Results were quick to come. He won gold in the 2001 Victorian 30 km event (**2:28:59**), gained silver in the Victorian 15 km and Victorian 20 km events and was 4th in the Australian 30 km title in Hobart in September in **2:30:41**. Then in December, he recorded a big PB time of **1:33:35** to finish 3rd in a VRWC 20 km event.

After a successful summer season on the track, Frank contested the Australian 50 km title race that was held at Albert Park in May 2002. His 5th place in **4:19:28** gained him selection for the IAAF Racewalking World Cup. Buoyed by his first international selection, he recorded a PB to finish 4th in the Canberra 20 mile event (**2:42:54**). He then won the Victorian 20 km (**1:34:20**) and 30 km (**2:29:29**) titles before coming 2nd in the Australian 30 km title event (**2:32:50**) which was held in Nowra in NSW and in the AFRWC 20 km title (**1:34:06**) in Ballarat.

In the World Cup 50 km event in Turin in September, he finished a good 47th in **4:20:26** and the Australian 50 km team finished with a best ever 4th place in the teams competition.



The 5 Aussie entrants in the successful 2002 World Cup 50 km team - Darren Bown, Duane Cousins, Frank Bertie, Liam Murphy and Luke Adams – out training before the big event in Turin

At the age of 36, Frank had a new lease of life and returned to Australia with fresh enthusiasm and dedication. After another competitive summer season, he took 5th place in a high quality Victorian 5000m track title in **21:37** and 4th in the Australian 20 km title in **1:33:57**, just outside his best ever time.

As the 2003 winter season progressed, his performances improved even further. It was PBs all around with 3rd in the Canberra 20 mile (**2:42:12**), 2nd in the Victorian 20 km (**1:33:35**) and 1st in the Victorian 30 km (**2:25:44**). He finished off the season with 2nd in the Federation 20 km in Sydney (**1:34:41**) and won his first Australian title over 30 km in Melbourne (**2:27:21**).

Frank now focused on the December 50 km trial for the 2004 World Cup and seemed to have everything under control when he comfortably recorded just over 2:30 for a VRWC 30 km in November. Alas, a foot injury flared and he was sidelined in the crucial final weeks. In a fiercely contested trial in hot conditions in Melbourne, he faded to 6th place with a time of **4:27:52**. To make it worse, there were already 5 walkers with times better than the 4:20 qualifying standard – his chances for a second World Cup appearance looked remote.

Rather than give up his dream, he continued to chase times in an effort to sway the selectors. He recorded a PB time of **1:32:35** in placing 6th in the A Series 20 km roadwalk in Canberra in late January but then faced to 8th in the 2004 Australian 20 km title in a much slower time.

The selectors confided to him that a sub 4:20 performance over the 50 km distance would be looked upon favourably. Scanning the international fixture, he saw his only chance – an IAAF event to be held in Tijuana in Mexico on 20 March. He packed his bags, spent a week acclimatising in Darwin and then boarded the plane for distant shores. In a fairy tale ending, he came 12th in Mexico in a PB time of **4:16:23** and the door opened once again. With Nathan Deakes opting for the 20 km distance in the World Cup, Frank was added to the team.

He now had 6 weeks to recover before the World Cup 50 km, scheduled for 1 May in Germany. It was really an impossible ask after such a roller coaster ride. To his credit, he came 40th in the World Cup event in a time of **4:21:22**. He then stayed on in Europe for the next 5 months, travelling extensively and racing sparsely. In late June, he competed in the Dublin Grand Prix of Racewalking, recording **1:33:30** for the 7th in the 20 km event.



Frank records 1:33:30 in the 2004 Dublin Racewalking Grand Prix

The previous 4 years had been the best of his career and, at 38 years of age, Frank was still improving. The only question was whether he could continue to hold out the younger walkers and remain in the top echelon. His plan was a radical one.

He chose to see out the remainder of 2004 from a training base in Italy and did not return to Australia until December. After a few low key summer races, he returned to Italy for further training and was not seen again until May 2005.

His subsequent winter season was good but not great, being hampered by a number of niggling injuries. He did record a 10 km PB time of **45:22** at Albert Park in a VRWC handicap race in late July and then did a 5 second PB to finish 4th in

the Victorian 30 km title a week later with **2:25:39**. But back spasms ruined his chances in the Australian 30 km roadwalk championship in late August and he struggled to 5th place with a slow **2:30:34**.

Since he had not contested the Australian 50 km title in May, his only chance of gaining a third World Cup berth lay in a good finish in a special 50 km qualifying race to be held at Albert Park in October. His non-finish (he retired at the 30 km mark) seemed to spell an end to his international career.

He had one final chance, namely some good finishes in the early 2006 European races. He continued to train and was rewarded with a PB time of **21:27.27** when coming 7th in the Ron Clarke Classic meet in Geelong in December. But his euphoria was short lived. His two European races in March 2006 resulted in 2 disqualifications. Shattered, he returned to Australia.

To his credit, Frank continues to train as enthusiastically as ever and has built up a small training squad. While his international career may be waning, he seems to be starting a new career as a mentor and coach. Currently looking after Tom Barnes and Megan Szirom, two of our top walkers, his enthusiasm and experience are being passed onto the next generation.

His best racing has come in the last couple of years as he approaches 40 years of age. His PBs are as follows:

3000m	1994	12:34.0
5000m	2006	21:27.27
10 km	2005	45:22.0
20 km	2004	1:32:35.0
30 km	2005	2:25:39.0
50 km	2004	4:16:23.0