

Harry Summers

1981	Racewalking World Cup	Valencia	50 km	38 th	4:43:43
1985	Racewalking World Cup	Isle of Man	50 km	42 nd	4:56:58

Harry Summers, born 10th June 1935, was another of the strong Victorian walking squad who came to the fore in the 1950's. He began racing in 1953 as a 17 year old and joined the Victorian Walkers Club the following year, the same time as Bob Gardiner.



Harry (88) leads Ted Allsopp (51) and Noel Freeman (66) in the 1960 National Track Championships.

Within two years, Harry had won his first national medal (a bronze) in the 1955 Australian 10,000m championship in Brisbane (**49:21**). He gained second place in the Australian track 2 mile title in 1956 (**14:15**) and was third in 1960 (**15:00**). He subsequently featured in many clashes with Bob Gardiner and Ted Allsopp throughout the 1960's until consistent injuries and frustration influenced his decision to return to cycling.

In nearly 15 years of chasing championships as a walker, he had represented Victoria some 18 times on both track and road but, in race after race, he had to fill minor places behind Olympians Noel Freeman, Don Keane, Bob Gardiner and Ted Allsopp.

He was a good cyclist - among his victories was the Grafton to Inverell classic – but he could only go close in the big championships. Again the major accolades wins eluded him.



Harry on the bike in 1963

In the early 1970's, he turned to orienteering, again with success. Opting for the very long rogaining events (12 hours, 50miles, etc), he was amongst the top performers. Interestingly the top rogainer of the time was Alex Tarr, another ex walker.

Harry returned to serious walking with the advent of the Veteran movement and won gold and silver in the 1981 World Veteran championships (45+ age group) in New Zealand. Then in cold windy conditions at Fishermans Bend in Melbourne, he finished 3rd in the 1981 Australian 50 km title in **4:33:11**, 3 seconds ahead of 4th place. This gained him selection in Australia's 1981 Lugano Cup team and he rates that selection as the "*personal highlight of my career*". He was the oldest athlete, at 46, to represent Australia. He had finally gained his first international selection after 29 years of competitive walking.

In the hot and humid conditions of Valencia, he was one of only two Australians to finish the 50 km event. His time of **4:43:43** was slower than he had hoped but it was still a good walk in the conditions.

In 1983, he went to his second World Championships but in another capacity – he was the manager of the team that went to Bergen.

He was 5th in the 1984 Australian 50 km title (**4:45:49**) and followed this up with a good trial walk to be selected as a walker again in the 1985 World Walking Championships team. In the Isle of Man, at 50 years of age, he was again one of only two Australians to finish, coming 42nd in **4:56:58**.

In that same year, he managed the first Australian walking team, (Sally Pierson, Kerry Saxby and Anne Ryan) to visit China. This was partly financed by the Australia China Council

In 1987, he went to the World Walking championships in Barcelona – as manager again.

Harry has worn many other hats and has had many milestones during his long career in athletics

- He has been an ATFCA Level 3 Coach since 1983 (he was one of the first to achieve the Level 3 status) and has coached a long list of Australian walkers to international status.

- In 1983, he was elected to the position of VRWC President, a position he held for an amazing 29 years, eventually stepping down in 2013. He was awarded life membership of the club in 1990.
- He organized and took Australian teams of walkers to the 8 Nations Meets in Europe between 1990 and 1993.
- As President of VRWC, he was an automatic Vice President of Racewalking Australia for many years and actually served as President of Racewalking Australia from 2002-2004.
- He has been on the executive of the Australian Track and Field Coaches Association since 1993, only recently standing down.
- He became the Australian National Walk Coach in 1998 and then held the position of National Walks Coach (Educational), working alongside Ron Weigel, the AIS walking coach.



Harry officiating recently at one of our VRWC races at Middle Park

After over 60 years of involvement in race walking as a competitor and official, Harry is still keenly involved and remains on the VRWC Committee. And he even has the occasional racewalk when he is not officiating.

Tim Erickson
16 June 2015