

## VALE MARLAINE STANWAY: 1938 - 2019

Marlaine Stanway, born 1<sup>st</sup> July 1938, took up racewalking in 1977 at 39 years of age. She was the busy mother of a family of 6 children (4 daughters and 2 sons) and was looking for an activity to lose weight. One of her daughters was involved in athletics as both a runner and a walker and Marlaine chose racewalking as the activity of choice.

She approached Betty Newman at a Veterans meeting at the Box Hill track one evening and asked for advice. Under Betty's guidance, she improved quickly. In 1978, she joined the Victorian Amateur Walker's Club (VAWC) and started building up her weekly mileage.

By 1979 she had advanced sufficiently to contemplate a trip to Hannover in Germany for the World Veterans Championships and took bronze medals in the W40 5000m trackwalk (**26:21**) and the 10 km roadwalk (**53:42**). These are still competitive times forty years down the track and they indicate how quickly Marlaine had improved from her zero base position two years earlier. In fact, these remain her PBs to this day.

In 1981, now being coached by Harry Summers (who coached her from then on, throughout her career), she saddled up for the next World Veterans Championships being held in Christchurch, New Zealand, and there she improved to take silvers in both walks and a Gold in the Teams event.



*Marlaine in action in the 1981 World Masters championships*

She also did the occasional run with her husband Roy and, around this time, won the Australian Veterans W40 Cross Country championship. A good track runner in the Veterans level, her best 5000m time was 20:03.

While Marlaine was a good track walker over the shorter distances, it was the longer distances that she loved, both for training and for racing, and it was in 1982 that she broke new ground and became the first Victorian woman to finish a 50 km racewalking event. Her time of **5:52:03** in the Victorian Open roadwalking championship that year was good enough to take 6<sup>th</sup> place and, to this day, she remains one of a very select group of Australian women who have completed a 50 km event. That same year she also competed in the Canberra 20 Mile event, finishing 19<sup>th</sup> in a time of **3:27:48**.

In preparation for these events, she trained on her own, amassing the miles along the Yarra bike path each evening after work in the city. She regularly clocked up 100 km or more a week and her weight had dropped from an initial 70 kg to a trim 54 kg.

*"I used to sit around and knit and do nothing. When I started walking, I just walked around the track and it nearly killed me. I had so many aches and pains I wondered sometimes if it was worth it. But I was determined to win a medal so I kept trying."*

She also competed regularly in the Victorian Open Women's championships and, in 1986, took bronze in the Victorian 20 km championship (**2:09:05**) behind Lorraine Jachno and Sharon Schnyder. She also took bronzes in the Victorian Open track walking championships on a number of occasions in the early 1980's. Her 1984 bronze medal in the Victorian 5000m track championship was a special occasion. Sue Cook won in a World Record time of 22:06.2 ahead of Sally Pierson (22:52.9) and Lorraine Young (23:35.6). The next two placed were filled by Eva Gustafsson and Ann Jansson, both of Sweden, and then Marlaine, in the Box Hill colours, was next. The Victorian championship result showed Sally first, Lorraine second and Marlaine third and she mounted the presentation dias alongside three of Australia's best ever female walkers – elite company indeed!



*Marlaine shares the podium with Lorraine Young, Sally Pierson and Sue Cook after the 1982 Victorian 5000m walk*

It was not until 1987 that she participated in her next World Veterans championships which were held in her native Melbourne. There, at 49 years of age, she took bronze in the W45 5000m track walk in around 27 minutes. She had maintained her form well. Her only other World Veterans outing was in 2001 when the event came to Australia once again, with Brisbane as the host city. There she missed out on an individual medal but she was part of the Australian women's team which took gold in the road walk.

Overall, her World Veterans collection of medals consists of 2 Team Golds, 2 individual Silvers and 3 individual Bronzes.

In 1997, she set herself another long distance goal, to become a centurion by walking 100 miles within 24 hours. Those of us who were watching her progress had little doubt that she would achieve the task even though she was by that stage 59 years old. Alas, a bout of glandular fever put paid to her preparation and she could only watch from the sidelines as others took up the ultimate challenge and as Carmela Carrassi became the first female member of the Australian Centurions.

Marlaine's husband Roy took up athletics at the same time as her in 1977, again to lose weight and to work on general fitness. It's hard to believe, looking at Roy now, that he was 12 stone in weight at that time. He chose running as his sport of choice and, like Marlaine, threw himself into Veterans athletics. Again, like Marlaine, he was successful, winning a number of Australian Age Group championships over distances such as 10,000m. He ran a 2:55 marathon when aged in his fifties, a tough feat by any standard.

She had more than her fair share of setbacks. In May 2005, she tripped and fell heavily in one of our club races and badly damaged her left shoulder. It took 4 operations and more than 2 years for her to regain any significant range of movement in her left arm and, even then, it remained weaker than the right and restricted her in her day to day activities. Yet, in August 2006, she fronted in the Victorian Masters 20 km roadwalking championships and won the

W65 division in a new Australian Masters record time of **2:29:35**. This was on little or no training and with a painfully sore shoulder throughout the race.



*Marlaine in action in a Shield Competition at Box Hill in March 2007*

Like all Masters athletes, Marlaine always looked forward to moving up an age group. I remember well in 2008, when she celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday with a twinkle in the eye. Another Masters age group beckoned and with it another chance to try herself out against those of her age. With a much improved shoulder, she would finally be able to resume proper training. On top of that, she would now be one of 'the young ones' in the W70-74 age group and she intended to make the most of it.

Marlaine was a great club contributor in other ways. She joined the VRWC Committee in 2003 and, over the ensuing years, fulfilled roles such as Club Captain, Canteen Coordinator and General Committee Member. In 2008, she was awarded VRWC Life Membership, a just recognition of her many years of contribution to the club.



*Marlaine is handed her VRWC Life Membership badge by club president Harry Summers in November 2008*

She eventually retired from racewalking in May 2010, aged 72. One of her last races was in the Australian Masters 20km Roadwalk Championship in Melbourne, where she won the W70 gold medal with a time of **2:33:31**.

Her commitment to the club continued well past her retirement from racing, and she remained on the committee until

2017. A behind the scenes worker, she was present on every race day, whether it was helping with setup, helping with lapscoreing or on the refreshment table or helping Barb and Joyce in the canteen, and then vacuuming and cleaning the rooms at the end of the day.

During 2018, Marlaine started to suffer unexplained symptoms such as loss of balance and she was eventually diagnosed with rapid onset motor neurone disease. Her deterioration was swift and relentless and she entered hospice care in early December. To the end, she suffered no impairment to her senses other than the frustrating lack of movement in her limbs, as her body shut down. She remained bright and chatty when visited by her many friends from athletics, but her frustration was evident.

She was surrounded by the love and support of her family through this last period of her life. She died on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2019, aged 80.

The Victorian racewalking and masters communities have lost a great supporter and a wonderful friend.

Tim Erickson  
Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2019