

Sally Pierson

1979	Racewalking World Cup	Eschborn	5 km	11 th	24:08
1981	Racewalking World Cup	Valencia	5 km	6 th	23:51
1983	Racewalking World Cup	Bergen	10 km	4 th	45:39
1985	World Student Games	Kobe	5000m	7 th	24:02

Sally Pierson looked anything but a champion walker when she stepped onto the starting line. Diminutive in stature and slight in build, she was always overshadowed by her taller fellow competitors. But when the gun went, Sally would immediately surge to the front, arms flailing in a seemingly flat out sprint. As the race progressed, few could ever stay with her as she relentlessly pushed herself to the limit and beyond.



Sally Pierson competes in the 1979 Racewalking World Cup 5 km.

An outstanding under age athlete, she first gave notice of her prodigious talent on February 11 1978 when she set Australian and Victorian Under 15 and Under 16 3000m walk records at Aberfeldie with **14:13.2**. This record still stands as a Victorian record some 22 years on.

She followed this up in Perth with wins in the 1979 Australian track Open and Junior championship double. She was amongst the youngest to win an Australian Open championship, just days short of her sixteenth birthday, when she beat Rachel Thompson, Karen Iselin and Francis Burke in the Open 5,000m title. She had earlier defeated Anne Reddish and Rachel Thompson to win the Junior title.

Sally was 16 when she competed in Australia's first Eschborn Team later that same year. She walked very well to finish 10th in **24:10**. Her team mates were Sue Cook, Lorraine Young and Karen Iselin.

She was back again in 2 years time for the 1981 Eschborn Cup in Valencia and performed even better, finishing one place ahead of Sue Orr in 6th (**23:51**). She was still only 18. Australia (Sally, Sue and Anne Ryan) was 3rd in the womens team championship.

1982 saw some great performances. On February 21 at Olympic Park in Melbourne, she beat Sue Orr and Lorraine Young, recording **13:02.5** for a new Australian Open record. Then she beat Sue again to win the Australian 5000m

track title in **23:14**. But Sue came back with a vengeance to win the road title in an even faster 22:27 as the fierce rivalry continued.

Sally also won the Australian 10 km road running title (35:57) in Sydney in 1982. This was her first major running championship and for the remainder of her career she mixed walking and running with great success.

On May 8 1982 in a VRWC 10 km handicap race at Albert Park, Sally set a new World best time for the 10 km walk with **45:38**.



Sally and Sue Cook race each other once again – this time in 1982

Sally missed the National track titles in 1983, held while she was competing in the World Cross Country titles. When she returned, she won the inaugural Australian 20 km title in **1:39:34**, beating SA walker Lillian Harpur. At the LBG 5000m title, she maintained her outstanding form, scoring an impressive victory in **23:18**.

Perhaps her finest performance was in the 1983 Eschborn Cup when she recorded an outstanding 10 km (**45:39**) for 4th place, just behind Sue Cook who was 3rd. The first 4 all broke the existing World Best road time.

In 1984, she won the inaugural Australian 10 km walk title in **48:31** for her fourth Australian Open championship victory. This was only 2 hours after finishing 2nd in the Australian 10 km road running title.

She also scored an impressive victory in the Federation 5000m title in Ballarat in **22:59**, beating Kerry Saxby. Little did anyone know at this stage that she had less than a year remaining in the sport.

She was selected for the 1985 World Student Games in Kobe in Japan but finished in 7th place in **24:02**. It was her last international walk competition. She was disappointed with her form and withdrew from the Eschborn team for which she had also been selected. At 22 years and 6 months, her retirement was a big loss to race walking.

Her parallel running career was impressive. She represented Australia in the 1983 and 1985 World Cross Country Championships and at the 1984 IAAF World 10 km road running championship, won two Zatopek 10,000m classics, won a Victorian 10000m track title and the Australian 10 km road and cross country titles.

Sally Pierson and Sue Orr had been arch rivals in the late seventies and early eighties. These two extraordinarily competitive athletes pushed each other to record breaking performances. It was left to Sue to carry the flag on her own once Sally retired.