

Sue Cook (Orr)

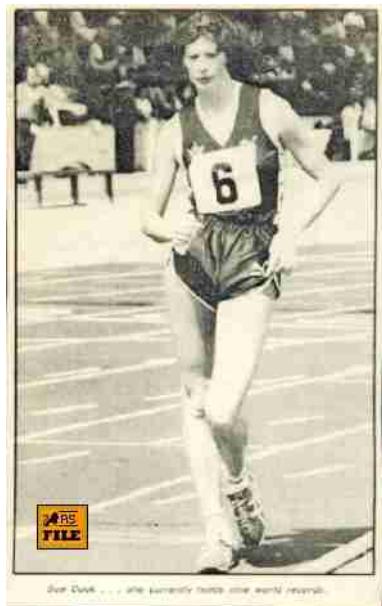
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|------|-----------------------|--------------|--------|------------------|----------|
| 1979 | Racewalking World Cup | Eschborn | 5 km | 6 th | 23:10:11 |
| 1980 | IWF World Champs | New York | 5 km | 1 st | 23:39 |
| 1981 | Racewalking World Cup | Valencia | 5 km | 7 th | 24:04 |
| 1982 | IWF World Champs | Bergen | 5 km | 1 st | 23:03 |
| 1983 | Racewalking World Cup | Bergen | 10 km | 3 rd | 45:26 |
| 1984 | IWF World Champs | Lomello | 10 km | DNF | |
| 1985 | Racewalking World Cup | Isle of Man | 10 km | 14 th | 48:17 |
| 1987 | World Indoor Champs | Indianapolis | 3,000m | 15 th | 13:45 |
| 1987 | Racewalking World Cup | New York | 10 km | 13 th | 46:03 |
| 1987 | IAAF World Champs | Rome | 10 km | 12 th | 46:20 |
| 1991 | Racewalking World Cup | San Jose | 10 km | 59 th | 51:29 |

Sue Cook, born in 1958, came from a sporting family. Her sister Jenny represented Australia at the 1972 Olympics in the 1500m run and set an Australian record time of 4:08.6, a wonderful time that stood until 1996. On top of that, her father Theo was a record breaking Veteran runner. With such a pedigree, it was not surprising that Sue, tall and athletic in build, should also enter the athletic arena.

She confirmed her early potential in November 1976 when she broke the Victorian Open 3,000m walk record in a sensational **13:54.4**, only 4.8 seconds outside Anne Pembroke's Australian record. Within two months, on January 8 1977, she clocked **6:35.1** to break the World 1500m walk record. In February 1977, Sue again lowered the Australian and World records to **6:29.4**, beating Kerrie Neville and Sally Pierson.

After beating Janette Whirripey in the 1977 Victorian 3,000m title, Sue, still only 18, captured her first Australian Open championship, the 3,000m track walk, beating Lillian Harpur and Rachel Thompson with a time of **14:09**.

She went on to score another victory over Lillian, Rachel and Miriam Harding in the national 5,000m road championship later that same year.



Sue in action in 1978

A seasoned competitor at 19, Sue made it three Open national championship victories in a row at the 1978 Australian track titles beating Rachel and Lillian in the inaugural 5000m track title (**24:09**). Then she followed the trend of our previous women champions and announced her retirement while at the top.

She was enticed back to racing with newfound enthusiasm following the decision to send a team to Germany to compete in the 1979 Lugano and Eschborn Cups. This decision ended the girls' isolation from international competition and gave Sue a new lease of life. She celebrated by winning the Australian 5,000m road title in front of Lillian Harpur, national track champion Sally Pierson and Lorraine Young.

Sue, Sally Pierson, Lorraine Young and Karen Iselin were selected to represent Australia in the 1979 Eschborn Cup. Our girls performed well - Sue finished 5th in **23:10**, Sally 10th in 24:10 and Lorraine 15th in 24:35. Australia finished 3rd in the womens team competition, confirming our position as one of the top womens walking nations.

The thrill of international competition and her 5th place in the Eschborn Cup in Germany boosted Sue's confidence and in February 1980 she broke Anne Pembroke's Australian 3,000m track record with a **13:44.3** effort, cutting 5.3 secs off Anne's five year old record. A week later she reduced the Australian 5,000m record by a massive 48 secs to **23:02.8**. She then produced a staggering effort, slashing a further 41.5 secs off her pending 3000m record, reducing it to **13:02.8**. These two outstanding performances gained her a sports star award and world ranking as one of the top walkers over all distances.

She then won the 1980 Australian track title from Anne Ryan, Sally Pierson and Lorraine Young and regained the Australian road championship, beating Lorraine Young, Lillian Harpur, Anne Ryan and Karen Iselin.

Sue justified her ranking in New York in August 1980, defeating Sue Broddock (USA) and Anne Peel (Canada) to win the IWF World 5,000m walk championship in **23:39** and a place in history as the first Australian walker to win a world title. It was a memorable day for Australian race walking and for the temperature (36 °C).

This was followed by a list of impressive victories and world record performances. In fact by early December 1980 Sue Cook's name appeared 12 times in Palle Lassen's and Egon Rasmussen's World Race Walking Statistics Book. She held five world records at the end of 1980: the 3,000m in **13:20.7** (March 8), the 10 km road in **46:48** (May 11), the 15 km road in **73:59** (July 13), the 1500m in **6:19** (November 11) and the 1 mile in **6:57.1** (November 12, 1980).

These outstanding performances by Sue and promising performances by junior Anne Miller in the shorter walks resulted in both girls winning selection to the Australian Institute of Sport when it opened in January 1981. (Over the next 7 years, Sue made the most of her AIS scholarship and had a long and illustrious international career. She remained at the AIS until she retired in 1987.) Her husband Bruce Cook was the walks coach in 1981 and 1982 before Craig Hilliard was appointed walks and multi-event coach.

With the resources of the AIS behind her, Sue was able to concentrate on her walking. She won the 1981 National Track 5000m title in **22:53**, a championship best. Then she won the LBG 5000m in an identical time but had to work hard to beat Sally Pierson who was fast closing the gap. In the Racewalking World Cup in Valencia, Sue had to lower her colours to Sally. Sue was 7th in **24:04** while Sally was 6th.

Sally Pierson continued her dominance into 1982 with some great performances. On February 21 at Olympic Park in Melbourne, she beat Sue and Lorraine Young, recording 13:02.5 for a new Australian Open record. Then she beat Sue again to win the Australian 5,000m track title in 23:14. But Sue came back with a vengeance to beat Sally on 23 May in a 5,000m track walk. Sue recorded **22:32.4** for a new World record while Sally's time of 22:43 was an Australian Junior record. Then 20 hours later on May 24, Sue recorded **45:42.6** in a 10,000m walk at the Olympic Sports Field in Adelaide for yet another World record, breaking Swedish walker Ann Janson's time by 1 min 15 secs. She then won the Australian 5000m road title in July in an even faster **22:27**. Two weeks later in Bergen, she was triumphant in retaining her World 5000m championship in **23:03**.

In December 1982 in Melbourne, in one of her very few longer races, she walked a world best of **1:36:32** for the 20 km road.

As 1983 started, Sue showed no signs of flagging. First she set her third World 10,000m record and a World 1 hour record. She scored a comfortable win over Lorraine Young in the Victorian 10 km title and then won the National 10 km title, beating Sally Pierson. Her continuing status at the top of world walking was confirmed with 3rd place in the 1983 Eschborn Cup 10 km in Bergen (**45:26**), one place ahead of Sally Pierson. The first 4 all broke the previous World road best time and Australia once again came third in the womens competition.

1984 started as usual with more records. She recorded a world best 1500m of **6:10** in January before recording the fastest ever 5000m time in Australia to regain her national track championship in **22:04.4**. Sally was 2nd as usual.

The 1984 World Championships were held in Lomello in Italy and Sue and Lorraine Young were selected. Unfortunately Sue was forced to retire at the 4 km mark while holding a narrow lead – due to a bad case of flu. This was the start of a bad period for her. Consistent shin problems forced her to an operation and post-operative complications further delayed any comeback.

In 1985 a walk for women was added to the IAAF World Indoor Championships but Sue had to forgo it while her recovery continued. Then to further complicate things, a new face appeared on the scene - Kerry Saxby. In comeback mode, Sue was 2nd to Kerry in the Australian 10 km road title and then she placed 14th in the 1985 Racewalking World Cup with **48:17** as against Kerry's 10th in 47:11.

In 1986, Australia was invited to send a team to the World Race Walking Criterium being held at Lomello in Italy. Lorraine, Sue Cook, Kerry Saxby and Rachael Thompson were selected. On June 15, Sue placed 4th in the 10 km roadwalk in **46:44** (Kerry won in 45:59) then followed up with 6th in the 5 km walk the next day in **23:20**. In the overall results, she finished 4th, a wonderful international performance, but one that was overshadowed by Kerry's subsequent win in the Goodwill Games and the string of Australian and World records that she soon started to amass.



Sue Cook in action in the Lugano Cup 10 km walk in New York in 1987

Sue was not one to shrink from a challenge and she gamely chased Kerry over the next 2 years, continuing to perform at a high level and produce great times. There was, however, a personal toll, and in 1987, plagued by a series of minor injuries, she retired after a decade at the top.

When it became known that the womens walk would be included in the 1992 Olympics, Sue made a comeback. She was 2nd in the 1990 Canberra Carnival 5000m walk in **22:38** and then backed up and won the 1990 Australian 8km title in **37:44**. Another 2nd in the 1991 Canberra Carnival 5000m walk in **22:54** saw her moving into major contention but the comeback was ruffled by a disappointing walk in the National 10 km title in which she finished 7th in **48:51**.

She nevertheless continued her training, gearing towards the Olympic trial and by early 1992 whe was in top form. At the Seiko meeting in Sydney in January, she recorded **12:56** for 3rd place behind Kerry Saxby and Jane Saville. It was one of a number of competitive performances from Sue during the summer.

Unfortunately in the Olympic trial she could only manage 5th (4th Australian) in **47:52**, well outside the tough qualifying standard of 45:30. The writing was on the wall and Sue retired once again soon after this.

Sue's 21 national medals (13 golds), two World championship victories (1980 and 1982), a bronze at the 1983 Eschborn Cup, selection in the Eschborn Cup teams from 1979 to 1987 and over 30 World records or best times, have given her a permanent place in the history of race walking.