

Tim Erickson

1976	IAAF World Champs	Malmö	50 km	23 rd	4:20:23
1978	Commonwealth Games	Edmonton	30 km	3 rd	2:26:33
1979	Racewalking World Cup	Eschborn	50 km	25 th	4:03:17
1982	Commonwealth Games	Brisbane	30 km	6 th	2:19:45
1983	Racewalking World Cup	Bergen	50 km	25 th	4:15:12

The following has been taken from Peter Waddell's 'History of Australian Walking'. I am indebted to Peter for this generous appraisal.

Tim Erickson, born 23 November 1950, raced at 5ft 8in and 145 lbs. He was a member of Ivanhoe Harriers and was trained by John Boas who was at one time the Australian National Walking Coach.

Tim's walking career commenced in 1966 as a junior and was interrupted in 1968 to concentrate on his studies. It was not until April 1973 that he resumed racing as a 22 year old and he showed immediate potential over the long distances. He was 5th in the Australian 50 km title in his first year and by 1974, his times over the shorter distances were starting to come down. In that year he gained a third place in the Victorian 20 km championship and broken 100 mins for the first time.

In 1975, he really began to show what he was capable of and won the Australian 50 km in Perth in **4:33:04**. He followed this up with a new Australian record for the 50 miles which he covered in **8:14:46**.

But just when the gates seemed to be opening, he was beaten into second place in the 1976 Victorian 20 km championship by Willi Sawall, a relative newcomer to race walking, who equalled Noel Freeman's Australian record. This was to become a regular occurrence throughout Tim's career. He was overshadowed by Sawall and Dave Smith and had to play second fiddle to them on numerous occasions.

He was runner-up to Sawall in the 1976 Victorian 15 km, 20 km and 30 km and the LBG 20 miles title and would have been a certainty with Sawall for the 1976 Olympic 50 km, but the Olympic Games Organising Committee dropped the 50 km event from the 1976 Games.

The IAAF continued to recognise the 50 km as a major event and held a world walking championship over that distance at Malmö, Sweden in 1976. Australia was represented there by Sawall, Erickson and Robin Whyte. In that event, Tim finished a creditable 23rd in **4:20:23**.

Two weeks after returning from Sweden, Tim joined the small but elite list of athletes to become a centurion by walking the 100 miles at Adelaide in **22:10:27**.

He was now regularly breaking his PBs week by week but so were Willi Sawall and David Smith and he lost the 1977 Australian 50 km title to Sawall and finished second in the six major championships he contested; the Victorian 20 km, 30 km and 50 km title, the LBG 20 miles, the Federation 20 km in Brisbane and the Australia versus New Zealand match in Sydney.

Sawall and Erickson were selected in the 1978 Australian team to the Commonwealth Games at Edmonton, where Sawall collected the silver and Erickson won the bronze medal.

It was the same story in 1978 and 1979 with Erickson finishing second in 14 Victorian, Australian or Federation titles behind either Sawall or Dave Smith.

Erickson recorded an excellent 50 km in **4:03:17** at the 1979 Lugano Cup in Germany and a **4:05:03** in the 1980 Olympic Games trial. Both times were well under the Olympic qualifying time of 4:10:00 and he was selected for the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.



The 1978 Commonwealth Games trial at Fishermans Bend in Melbourne. Sawall was first in 2:19:25 and Erickson was second in 2:21:22, times that ranked them 1 and 2 in the Commonwealth and earned them rankings of 1 and 6 in the Australian Commonwealth Games athletics team.

The excitement of Olympic selection was short-lived. He and athletic followers were shocked when the AOC justification committee dropped him and many others from the team. He spent months recording personal best times in England in a vain effort to force his way into the team. He won the British 50 km title and beat a number of European based walkers who went on and competed at the Olympics. But the selectors were unmoved.

He was a very talented athlete and, like Bob Gardiner, a modest sportsman, but was unfortunate to be racing during the Sawall / Smith era.

An example of Erickson's extraordinary capacity for top class performances over a wide range of distances was in a 12 month period in 1979/1980 when he recorded personal best times of: 1500m in 5:36, 3 km in 11:53, 10 km in 42:32, 20 km in 1:27:12, 30 km in 2:15:47 and 50 km in 4:03:17.

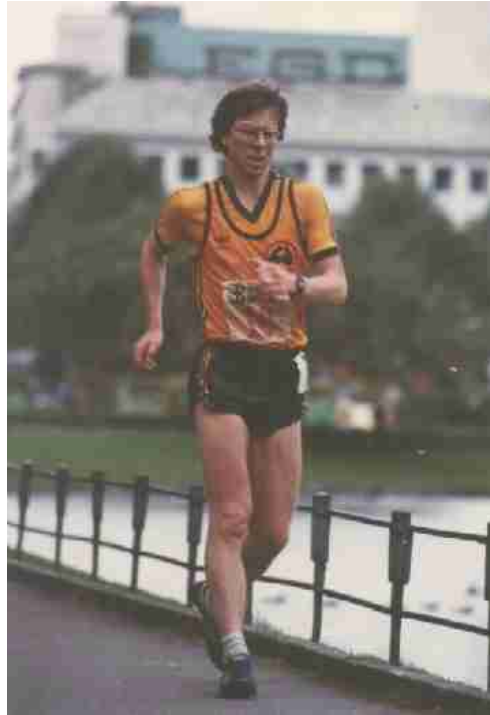
At the time, the only Australians to walk faster were: Willi Sawall in the 1500m, 3 km, 20 km, 30 km and 50 km and Dave Smith and Sawall in the 10 km.

Erickson lost motivation after the Olympic fiasco, but despite restricted training and racing he managed to retain third spot behind Sawall and Dave Smith in Australia. He was selected in the 1981 Lugano Cup team but pulled out as he was not really happy with his form and lacked enthusiasm.

With the 1982 Commonwealth Games on offer, he seemed to be coming back into good form with 2nd in the Victorian 30 km in 2:19:40, 3rd in the Victorian 20 km (1:29:15) and 1st in the VRWC 35 km in 2:47:22 (with a 30 km split of 2:17:22) but disaster struck and he was forced to miss the 1982 Commonwealth Games trial with the flu. He was selected anyway alongside Andrew Jachno and Sawall in rather controversial circumstances. Six weeks later at the 1982 Brisbane Games, he struggled in hot conditions to finish 6th in 2:19:45, still not fully recovered from the effects of his bout of illness.

In December 1982, he was selected alongside Sawall and Smith in an Australia vs Italy track match held at Olympic Park in Melbourne. He came 4th in 44:21, the highlight of an otherwise quiet summer season.

He spent most of the 1983 winter season running cross country but was a surprise entry in the Australian 20 km Adelaide when he finished 6th in **1:30:17** and 3 weeks later he came 2nd in the 50 km Lugano Cup trial in **4:21:50** over a tough hilly course outside Sydney. On the basis of these 2 performances, he was selected for the 50 km event in the Australian Lugano Cup team. But the 50 km trial had aggravated a groin tear and he was only able to train lightly for the remainder of the season. In Bergen, on limited work, he was the first Australian to finish in the 50 km event, coming 25th in **4:15:12**.



Tim Erickson in action in the 1983 Racewalking World Cup 50 km event in Bergen.

He then focused on trying to make an Olympic team for the third time but a badly torn knee cartilage forced him to retire in November 1983.

During his impressive career he was placed in 28 Victorian and 6 Australian championships. From 1974 to 1981 he was placed seven times in the LBG 20 miles title, including second place behind Sawall on five occasions.

In latter times, he dusted off the shoes and took silver and bronze in the 2001 World Veterans Games walks in Brisbane and gold and silver in the 2002 World Masters walks in Melbourne. Now he has officially retired from racing and continues to work for the Victorian Race Walking Club as club secretary.

He was awarded life membership of VRWC in 2005 and, at the time of writing, also fulfils a number of other notable roles in the Australian walking scene including

- Secretary of the Australian Centurions since 1995
- A member of the Athletics Australia Racewalking Committee
- Vice President of Racewalking Australia
- Website webmaster for RWA and the Centurions