



The Forum

WITH JOHN FOLEY

Mitchell keeps her World tilt on track

THERE are many athletes whose stories make you think twice about what you do with the hours in your day, and then there are people who downright put you to shame. Susie Mitchell is in the latter category.

A quick run through some of the facts puts things into perspective.

After a few years engrossed in the world of adventure racing (running up mountains, kayaking across reservoirs and cycling through the night for kicks) the Oak Park native took up track cycling in 2011.

A novice to the sport, she immediately looked like a seasoned pro. Cycling with the Sundrive Track Team in Dublin, she finished third in the 500m time trial at the Leinster Championships in her first year. By 2012 she was third in the national championship in the Pursuit and second in the 500m time trial.

Then in October of last year she took her talents to the World Masters Track Cycling Championships where she won gold in the 2km Pursuit.

Oh and by the way, four months before that world title she also gave birth to her first child, a daughter Tori, and while she was on maternity leave, as if she wasn't busy enough, she started to write a book about how athletes can stay in training while pregnant.

It didn't stop there. This year the 37-year-old has added six more medals at national championships and just 10 days ago she won silver in the 3km Pursuit at the European Masters in Wales. Now, she's winding up for a tilt at retaining her World Masters title in Manchester next month.

So you think your life is busy?

"I was delighted with the medal in Newport," says Mitchell, taking time out from a packed schedule which also includes her job as a vet. "The girl who won, Janet Birkmyre, is unbelievable. She's won 18 world titles and normally wouldn't be in my age group but they were combined for the Europeans and I ended up having to ride against her."

"I was neck and neck with her on the heat but in the final she pulled it out of the bag in the last two or three laps."

Birkmyre needed a personal best time to hold off the Carlow women.

Track cycling is growing steadily in Ireland with the success of British riders in recent Olympics starting to rub off on this side of the Irish Sea. Martyn Irvine from Co Down won gold and silver medals at the World Championships in Belarus earlier this year while others like Caroline Ryan and Ryan



Susie Mitchell heads to Manchester next month for the World Masters Track Cycling Championships. (Inset: Susie Mitchell (left) recently won silver at the European Masters in Wales)

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Mullen are also making a name for themselves.

However, from a facilities point of view the sport is still very much the poor cousin of the Irish sporting landscape with the outdoor track on Sundrive Road in Dublin the only facility.

"We really struggle without an indoor track and people like Mar-

tyn and Caroline travel abroad to train in Majorca," says Mitchell. "There's talk of building a track on a greenfield site in Abbotstown. It would be great if they could build a proper track."

Luckily, a summer of good weather meant the outdoor track in Dublin was in frequent use and Mitchell has kept a busy training schedule, one which she says was actually made that bit easier by becoming a mother.

"I came back fairly strongly after having the baby, won a few national medals and then it all built up to the gold at the worlds which I won four months after Tori was born," she says.

"When I had the baby, I found I was able to rest so much. There's not a whole pile you can do with a newborn baby so your downtime is totally your own which is brilliant. There's also no stress from work, no deadlines."

"I had heard that you get a bit of an aerobic boost after having a baby and you definitely do get a bit of a boost, but thankfully my success has continued and I've done better this year than last year."

Of course, it takes a certain type

of determination to maintain a training schedule throughout pregnancy. But she soon realised how difficult it was to get good advice on how much you could do with doctors, understandably, tending to be ultra-conservative in what they say to expectant mothers.

That's where the book – with a working title of *Pregnancy to Podium* – came in

"I kind of wrote the book I would love to have read while I was pregnant because there are a lot of very mixed opinions about what you can and can't do when you're pregnant. I just wanted to write about my own experiences."

Her research led to one particularly interesting chat with a legend of Irish athletics.

"I got in touch with Sonia O'Sullivan and I had a good chat with her about it," says Mitchell. "She said she was very much in the same boat when she was pregnant. There wasn't any good information about it and she was reading a line from a book here and line there and kind of making it up as she went along. I had always assumed that an elite athlete like her would have an army of people to

advise her."

With the Worlds just around the corner, there's no time for rest as Mitchell sets her focus on Manchester

"I'm looking at getting in seven or eight sessions, about 10 to 12 hours training per week," she says. "It's very focused training, high intensity, fast laps on the track, high leg speed, training my legs behind a motorbike. With track cycling, your cadence is very important. You have to be able to do high cadence without tiring, especially for the Pursuit."

She's confident that she's in the form of her life and she will make it difficult for anyone to take her Pursuit title away from her.

"In the Europeans I rode a personal best, faster than the Worlds last year so I've got a month now to hone it down," she says.

You know she'll be ready. Just another challenge to meet, one wheel spin at a time

The World Masters Track Cycling Championships take place in Manchester from 6-12 October. 'Pregnancy to Podium' will be available online in the coming months.