

AGE GROUP LEGENDS

Keith Bateman: like a fine wine; getting better with age.

At an age where most people are beginning to think about retirement, and have put their running PBs long behind them, Keith Bateman is rewriting the record books one event at a time. He is unstoppable in his age group, and continues to beat people one third his age. EDWARD O'NEILL talks to Australia's best Masters runner to find out how he does it.

KEITH BATEMAN is a man on a quest. He wants to stamp his name all over the 50-54 age group records on the track, both for NSW and Australia. And he's already half way there. Keith came to running somewhat late in life, when at 20 he decided to go fit for cross-country skiing. A conservative downhill skier and teacher already, he was bitten by the running bug, and what was intended as general fitness training turned into a healthy running addiction. Needless to say, the skiing went by the wayside. A year later in 1985, Keith was already attacking marathons, seeking the next challenge.

But despite setting his marathon PB (2:41:40) in 1986, and a series of half marathons in Scotland in 1998, his interest in running varied over the years. "When I came to Australia in 2001, I was 67 or 68, and I thought I'd better start getting fit," says Keith. He trained on his own for a while, then organised a group from the Sydney Striders to meet for speed work. "Knowing I had to make myself do [speed work], I just announced to the members that I would be there at 6am on Wednesday mornings doing speed trainings, if anyone wanted to join me. So then I was forced to go, whether I felt like it or not."

After joining his coach Sean Williams in 2003, he made the transition down to track running. "Sean started me on the track. I had never done it before, so I thought I'd try it. I had no idea what to do or where the race started," he jokes. "A 1500m, it's three and three quarter laps, well, I hadn't even worked that out. I thought 'where do you go? I nearly missed the start a few times'."

But Keith discovered speed he never knew he had, and a determination to break PBs set in. "If he is to claim every national record from 800m to 10,000m it will require a range of 2:00 for 800m, right through to 32:54 for 10,000m, something many runners in their 20s would find impressive. Yet Keith is on the right track (because the goal he already has the NSW record for the 1500m and 10,000m [and the half marathon], and the state and national record in the 3000m.

But to claim every record back, he is going to have to claim Tom Roberts' national 1500m record, which is also the world record for the age group. Standing at 4:05.20, the pro-voke Keith with his biggest challenge. "Undoubtedly the 1500m record is the most important, because that's a world record, as well as an Australian record. That would be excellent!" But Keith, ever the gentleman, is constantly playing down his chances of breaking the 4:05 mark, despite consistently improving over the last few years. "I think that one is probably beyond me but that doesn't mean I won't be trying." And of the Australian records? "I think probably the 5000m or 10,000m is worth the most, for me," he says, "because I'm not so good at the longer distances. The longer it is the harder it is."

Keith has been improving consistently since dropping down to track running four years ago. He credits this to changing several things progressively in his training regime. "First of all, I started off doing a 10km race every month. When I got fitter, I got to a stage where I had reached the limit with what I was doing - just racing every other week, and doing odd runs, without any real format." The next step was adding speed. "I started a speed running group with the Sydney Striders, which helped me get me up another few notches in my fitness."

Once he had reached the limit of training on his own, Keith decided to find a coach. "I asked in a sports shop if they knew of any coaches, and they put me in touch with Sean [his coach]. He gave me a program, which was the next step up."

After that, Keith's next step was the inclusion of strength work. And then, going to see a dietician, checking my diet. I also took barefoot running has helped me to go faster, that's a definite improvement, and also the competition of the group. Finally, I've just had a biomechanical assessment with Jason McLaren at Sport, and the idea of that is to analyse my running, see if I can improve it, make it more efficient, and therefore go faster." It seems Keith is always looking for that next little improvement, whatever will get him those extra few seconds.

Indeed, it's all about the times. "The reason I go for records is because records stand. You might win a race at the World Championships, but it's a one off. But if you get the record, it stays for a very long time."



Keith has not, despite his constant fitness and speed, broken any records yet.

long time" Keith admits he may give in to the lure of a World Championships PB, but definitely prefers to chase times in faster, lower level open races. "It's a lot of effort to go to national and international competitions, when sometimes the number of competitors in some events can be quite small. You may actually get a better race in a 'B' race in one of the state competitions here."

It's a mentality that's worked. If his goals for the next season are anything to go by, Keith may soon have all five NSW records for the 800m to 10,000m, three national records, and the scent of a few world records. The next challenge will be to keep them from 45-year-old Steve Monteghetti, who is showing no signs of slowing down.

But if nothing else, setting these goals helps to ensure that Keith enjoys his running and stays committed. "I definitely need motivation. I have to keep trying to improve." And for him, that is the beauty of the age group system: it helps to get more people involved, gives people something to aim for. "It's a good

measure, time for age," he says. In spite of running 110km weekly, Keith knows he is at an age where it can be harder to maintain a full load of training. While he does not dampen the enthusiasm and vigour with which he trains, he acknowledges one has to be wary at times. "You've got to be cautious. I watch very carefully what's happening. If I start to get an injury, I get onto it straight away. Sometimes I'll just not run for a day, if I think I've done too much, or if there's a niggle coming on."

"I'm a bit wiser about it now, I would probably have injured myself when I was younger, from not being sensible when a problem started to occur, not fixing it. So I'm much more aware of potential problems, and make sure I fix them."

So what are Keith's tips for other older runners? "Build gradually. Gradually introduce speed, join a group or a club. Get a program. Complete regularly." "The progression for me was consistent training, group training, and then training in a squad with better runners and younger up and coming runners. It's also important to avoid injury, by being aware of potential problems."

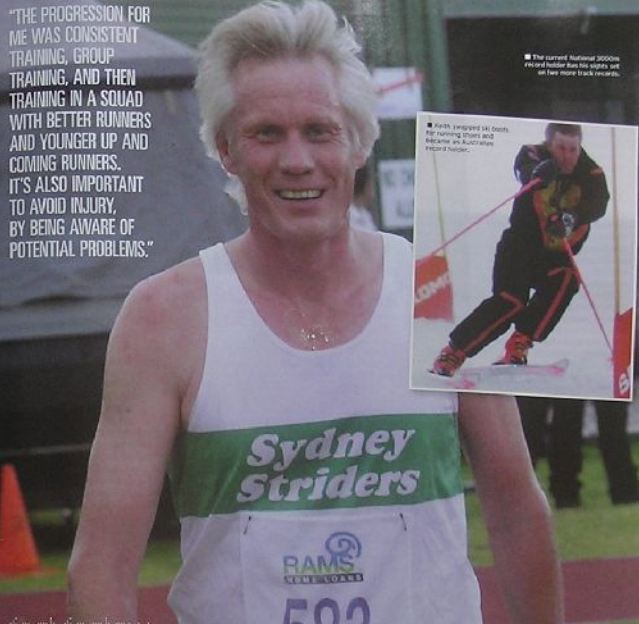
Keith is well aware that older runners need to be careful, as the body can take longer to adapt to physical stresses like intense training. "You need to go cautiously, building up maybe a bit slower than somebody else, taking your time and waiting for it to happen."

He also recommends an 'over 50s' check, getting everything checked out medically, including a heart stress test, which is very reassuring. I think that's a good one especially for older people before they start pushing it. "So it's not too late to start training competitively." "No, it's never too late! But the older you are, and the less fit you are, the slower you have to get into it, it has to be a gradual build up."

But in the end, Keith doesn't let his age enter the equation, and makes no excuses for himself. "I'm not sure if I could have gone even faster when I was younger, with the right training. But I don't feel my age is a problem at all, partly because I'm just running together."

"The fact is that it's an advantage sometimes, a win-win situation. I get beaten by a younger, that's ok, it doesn't matter. But if you beat them? "It's great I like that!"

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Keith engaged 64,000 for running 3000m and became an Australian record holder.

The current national 3000m record holder has his sights set on two more track records.

FULL NAME: Keith Ronald Bateman
DATE OF BIRTH: 29 June 1955
PLACE OF BIRTH: Watford, UK
NICKNAME: Fossil
CLUB: Sydney Striders
COACH: Sean Williams
SPONSORS: New Balance shoes
CURRENTLY LIVING: Paddington, Sydney
MARITAL STATUS: Living in sin
OCCUPATION: IT

HEIGHT: 180cm
WEIGHT: 74kg
SHOE SIZE: US 10
HAIR COLOUR: White; used to be blonde
MOST LOVED PAIR OF RUNNERS: Barefoot!
FAVOURITE SESSION: Long tempo run
FAVOURITE RACE: City2Surf (PB of 48:38 in 2006 - fastest ever time for an over 50)
WHAT MOTIVATES YOU: Going faster
GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT: Australian 50+ record in the 3000m - three times

DISTANCE	LIFETIME PERSONAL BEST	BEST TIME SINCE TURNING 50	NSW 50-54 RECORD	AUSTRALIAN 50-54 RECORD	WORLD 50-54 RECORD
800m	2:07.00	2:07.00	2:03.68	2:00.40	1:58.65
1500m	4:14.19	4:15.25	4:15.25	4:05.20	4:05.20
3000m	9:10.03	9:10.03	9:10.03	9:10.03	8:49.20
5000m	15:49.90	not yet run	16:02.20	15:49.40	14:53.20
10000m	33:20.30	33:20.30	33:20.30	32:54.80	31:01.90

Happy younger runners might get in the head of the Peter Klein Road Championships.