

TRIATHLETE OF THE YEAR

# triathlon

MAGAZINE CANADA

TRIATHLETES OF THE YEAR

**HEATHER  
WURTELE  
&  
LIONEL  
SANDERS**

**ROB BUREN**

Canada's First Kona  
Handcycle Finisher

**GEAR**

Oakley's Radar Pace  
Garneau's TR1  
Castelli

**TRAINING**

SWIM ETIQUETTE TIPS

KIRSTEN SWEETLAND'S

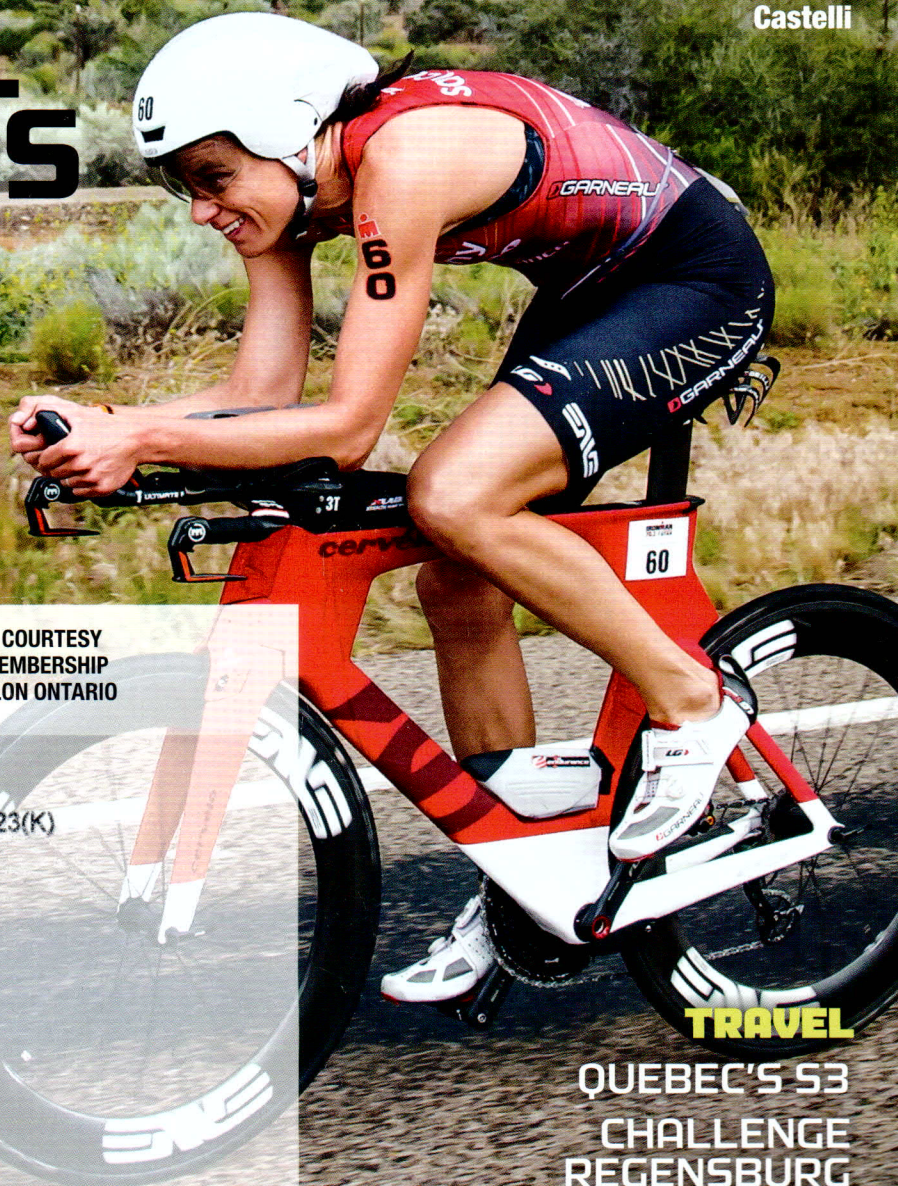
FAVOURITE RUN WORKOUTS



**Triathlon  
ONTARIO**

THIS ISSUE COURTESY  
OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP  
TO TRIATHLON ONTARIO

PP 40036245 S-5911 1/0/38 xxt223(K)  
ROBERT BUREN  
2460 HEMMFORD DRIVE  
OAKVILLE ON L6M 4R6



**TRAVEL**

QUEBEC'S S3  
CHALLENGE  
REGENSBURG





ABOVE  
Rob Buren completes  
his 2016 Kona goal

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# ROB BUREN

It was the morning of Oct. 5, 2008. Rob Buren lay on the ground in shock. His whole body ached tremendously so he just lay on the leaf-covered forest ground before attempting to get himself up. His legs pointing down the hill he had landed on, he tried to bring himself to his feet, but the motions weren't happening. His brain was sending the right signals to his limbs, but only his upper body was responding. He couldn't sit up. At that moment, he knew something was terribly wrong.

Buren and his friend Eric had been out for a routine early morning mountain bike ride near his home in Oakville, Ont. They came across a ramp that someone had set up on a fallen tree. Buren, always up for a challenge, figured if he attempted the jump, the worst thing that could happen was some damage to his bike. Maybe he'd wreck his back wheel.

"I might need some help getting out of the forest," he told Eric.

In mid-air Buren realized this jump wasn't going the way they usually did. As his bike tilted forward, he knew he wasn't going to land on his back wheel as planned. He was headed into the ground and it was too late to stop it. With a loud thud, he landed head-first on the dirt and heard a loud snap from his back as his legs tumbled over his head.

BY CLAIRE DUNCAN

Life changed for Buren and his family after that moment. Once a tall man with an athletic build of over six feet, he would now be in a wheelchair forever as a paraplegic. He had lost all control of his entire lower body as a result of a severe spinal cord injury. Doctors told him he was lucky to be alive.

Buren's wife, Sabrina Haque, remembers her husband's accident like it was yesterday.

It was a quiet, fall weekend morning like any other," she recalls. "I was with our daughters, who were two and four at the time, and we were just waiting for him to come home from his ride for pancakes. But he didn't come home."

Haque says she didn't know what to expect when she got to the hospital.

When I finally got to the emergency room and saw him in that state, the first thing he said to me was 'I'm so, so sorry,'" she says. "He was sorry for inconveniencing me. He was sorry for how this would affect everyone else." I wanted my life back right away," Buren explains. "Not just for me – mostly for my family. I couldn't let them fall apart because of this."

As he lay in his hospital bed in those initial phases before surgery, a few questions ran through his mind.

"My main thoughts were always about my daughters," Buren recalls. "How would I dance with them at their weddings? How would I be the father I wanted to be, while stuck in a wheelchair my whole life?"

But something else came to mind as well.

"I had recently started running with Sabrina," he explains. "We wanted to do a triathlon together. The Olympics had been on TV just months earlier, and I thought of the Paralympics. I knew there must be a way to keep up an active lifestyle despite the chair."

"The question was always, 'How am I going to do this?' It was never, 'Life is over.'"

Before he was even out of the hospital, Buren had taken steps towards becoming a triathlete.

"Someone came to visit me at the hospital. They showed me their handcycle, because they knew I wanted to do triathlon. I began to see what the options were for people like me," Buren says. "A month after the accident, I was practicing with the handcycle around the

hospital.

"I soon realized just how many people I could reach out to. There were so many resources, I just had to take the initiative to find them."

Buren joined the Mississauga Cruisers, a group for handcycle athletes who want to train and compete in varied sports recreationally or competitively. He got fitted for racing equipment and began to work with coach Mark Linseman of Team LPC to train for his first triathlon.

It wasn't long before he had trained for and completed his first half-distance race.

"Rob has to use his arms for the bike," explains Linseman. "This means that his training takes longer, because biking with your arms takes longer than biking with your legs."

It took a lot of work, but Buren started building endurance.

"Once I could do that distance, I was already looking for the next challenge."

It had to be Kona.

"When I was in bed recovering, I had seen Ricky James on TV – he was being featured in the 2008 Ironman World Championship.





## // He has something that not everyone has, which is complete laser focus. //

That was hugely inspirational for me,” Buren explains. “He was just this young guy when he broke his back and then he did an Ironman. I saw that it could be done. I wondered if I could get my own arms to carry me across that finish line.”

Some told him it wasn’t possible, but Buren chose to listen to those who believed he could.

“My wife Sabrina has always been my biggest supporter,” he says.

“He has always been a goal-oriented person,” Haque explains. “He has something that not everyone has, which is complete laser focus. When he set his mind on qualifying for Kona, I

didn’t doubt he would accomplish it.”

Buren says he found tremendous support all around him – from Team LPC to fellow paraplegic athletes in the community – which helped make Kona a tangible goal.

“What characterizes my story is that so many people have come out of the woodwork to help me accomplish my goals,” he says. “I truly believe that when the world sees you are committed to something, they respond and they will help you.”

From his first triathlon in 2010 to the finish line at Kona, that type of support has followed Buren the entire way.

“It certainly wasn’t an easy process – from a training standpoint, but also just getting to qualifying races,” Buren says.

There are only three Ironman races around the world at which paraplegic athletes can qualify for Kona, and there are only two spots available at each race.

“I got to Kona this year thanks to all the people around me. It really has been a team effort from start to finish.”

A team is exactly how Haque describes their family dynamic before, but even more so after, Buren’s accident.

“Getting to Kona was Rob’s driving force for the last two years. It framed everything he did. It also became the framework for our lives as a family,” Haque explains. “But we have always looked at things that way. We support each other in everything we do. That’s been an important message we have always shared with our daughters.”

Only Buren’s older daughter remembers her father pre-accident days. Haque says the positive influence he has on their lives has only been strengthened through his determination as a triathlete.


“Our older daughter Chloe moved away from home to pursue her dreams of becoming a professional ballet dancer at the age of 10,” she explains. “Chloe was always a homebody so the adjustment was really hard for her. But she will tell you she was brave enough to do it because of seeing what her dad accomplished. He gives her courage.”

By all accounts, the inspiration Buren gives his family has spread to everyone he meets.

“I think I’ve always been this way,” Buren replies, when asked how he remains so positive. “But what helps is the people I choose to keep in my life. I try to always start on the premise that people are good and I have

found that for the most part, they really are. I have seen that in the way so many strangers have helped me achieve my goals. I surround myself with great people and they elevate me.”

It comes as no surprise that Buren says he’s moving towards more public speaking in the future.

“I’m taking a little break from triathlon to pursue this other passion,” he says. “I want to share the message with others that despite challenges you may face, if you have a goal and stay optimistic while working hard, you can trust in the process and it will happen.” 



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ABOVE  
Bob Buren races the  
Buffalo Springs Triathlon

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