

A National Champ at 49

Olympian Jeannie Longo Has Competed In Every Olympics Since Women's Cycling Became an Event — And She's Still Going Strong

Frenchwoman Jeannie Longo-Ciprelli (often known as simply Jeannie Longo) is called the most successful woman cyclist of all time. And no wonder. Her credits, according to her official Olympic bio, include:

- 🚴 Thirteen world titles.
- 🚴 Only woman to win five road race world titles.
- 🚴 One Olympic Gold medal (1996 road race).
- 🚴 Two Olympic Silver medals ('92 road race and '96 time trial).
- 🚴 One Olympic Bronze medal (2000 time trial).
- 🚴 Ten UCI World Track Championship medals.
- 🚴 Competing in the past seven Olympic Games—that's every one since 1984.
- 🚴 Thirty-eight world records (outdoors and track in the 1 km, 3 km, 5 km, 10 km, 20 km and the hour). Her one-hour record is 29.92 miles, set in 1996 in Mexico City.
- 🚴 Fifty-five French championships.
- 🚴 First place in more than 1,000 races.

And this year, she won the French women's individual pursuit, the road championship and time trial to claim her nation's championships, which sent her to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. (By many accounts, against the wishes of the French cycling coaches who wanted to send younger, but much-less accomplished competitors.)

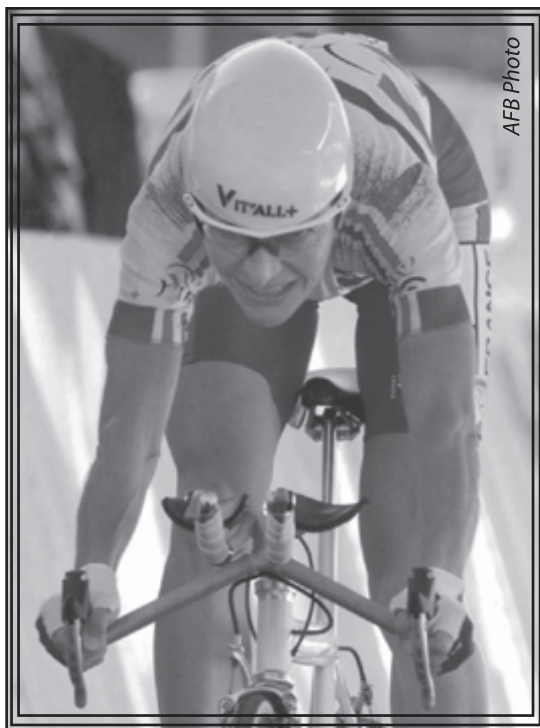
Some call her the best cyclist in history for her accomplishments and a tenure that's spanned the careers Greg Lemond, Lance Armstrong and beyond.

Her reign has not been without controversy. "Since 1979, she has been coached by her husband, Patrice Ciprelli, and has drawn as much criticism as

kudos," reports a recent article in The New York Times. "She has irked teammates, sued the French cycling

**"I don't think there will ever be another cyclist like Jeannie."
-Richard DeBernardis**

federation, threatened to change citizenship, and was once banished from the national team for selfish racing tactics."



Richard DeBernardis, president of the Perimeter Bicycling Association of America, who has become a close friend of Longo's, dismisses the criticism. "Those stories of her being hard to get along with are not true. She's a delight to have around. She is just very focused, goes after what she wants and doesn't take time to socialize when it's training time."

He sheds some light on her astonishingly long reign of success.

By Kari Redfield

"Jeannie's the most serious cyclist I've ever met," he says. "She likes riding by herself because she can concentrate on the areas that need improvement. To be as good as Jeannie Longo, you have to be a very self-directed, focused individual, and she definitely is that."

DeBernardis also points out that she knows herself well, is particular about the foods she eats (not just eating properly, but eating organically), the cleaning products and other chemicals used in her home and where she stays (as she is allergic to additives and many man-made chemicals), and what products she uses on her body. Knowing her body that well, as well as having a thorough knowledge of nutrition (on which she's published a book) is certainly an advantage for any athlete. In many interviews, she's cited her clean living as a reason behind her success over so many years.

DeBernardis first saw Longo at the Olympic Training Center the first year she did El Tour de Tucson, 2001. "She was in



At age 49, Jeannie Longo turned in an impressive Olympic performance. AFB Photo

the velodrome going around and around all by herself. She was beautiful to watch. Just beautiful ... so graceful.

"I don't think there will ever be another cyclist like Jeannie."

Jeannie's results in the 2008 Olympics put an exclamation point on DeBernardis' statement. She finished fourth in the women's time trial, 1 minute, 9 seconds behind the first-place finisher — less than 2 seconds behind the Bronze medalist — and 24th in the women's road race, just 33 seconds behind the first-place winner.

Kari Redfield is a Phoenix-based freelance writer.

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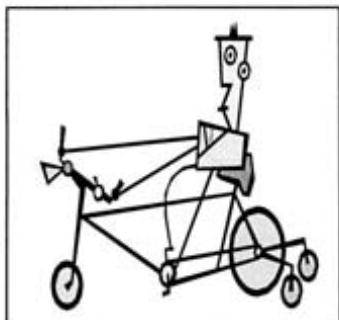
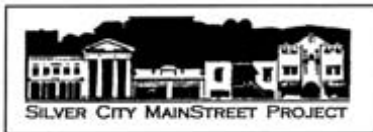
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