

NEWS AND RACING

WOMEN'S CYCLING  
NOW AVAILABLE AT THE  
TECH CYCLINGTIPS EMPORIUM

ADVENTURE



LEARN

CULTURE

SHOP

## The extreme methods and measures at the Australian women's development team selection camp

by Tom Palmer

April 29, 2015

ELLA SUPPORTED BY

29 NEW  
ARTICLES

I waited outside the Australian

Institute of Sport residence hall. It's something like a university college but more empty and austere. I'm waiting for Rochelle Gilmore, the woman behind Wiggle Honda and the High5 Dream Team. She's in Canberra for her latest project, the Australian women's European development program.

Gilmore emerges into the mist to greet me, ambassadorial in a suit and heels. I was meeting her to ask about what had revived this development pathway, which had been controversially cut earlier in the year. Partnering with Gilmore has allowed Cycling Australia to resuscitate the program.

Alongside her technical and logistical experience, Gilmore offers know-how in the business of commercialising women's cycling, attracting financial partners and providing return on that investment. But what was going on at that AIS laboratory was a whole lot more interesting than just that.

I followed Gilmore through the facilities into an enormous laboratory where what seemed like the spin class from hell was in progress. Nine women were in full flight on stationary bikes arranged in a semi circle. Each bike was manned by what looked like a research assistant or an intern and various machines. The women were wearing race numbers. They were red-faced, breathing heavily and dripping with sweat. It looked like training, but they were racing. Their eyes told me that.



They put together a program of how they are going to see the physical strengths and weaknesses and together with some psychologists and the special forces agents they've got together to work out how they are going to mentally and physically break these girls down and get them to their breaking point, and that's pretty much what the camp wants to do. It wants to see these athletes – see how they respond to things under pressure, under really, really severe fatigue.

The CA women's road panel will ultimately select the athletes based on reports, and there are very extensive reports being done every day by the expert staff. It wasn't until about day three where I thought: 'This actually works.' It's brutal and they're going to feel like they're in a living hell, but they're going to get a lot out of the experience.

— Rochelle Gilmore

I counted maybe five scientist types observing. In front of the athletes was a whiteboard displaying the intervals. A man in an AIS polo shirt bellowed out instructions from a clipboard. The women's power data was being recorded. I was told the other nine were doing time trials on the road. Beyond the brightly-lit lab, I looked out to dark grey clouds through streaks of rain on the glass windows.

Gilmore led me upstairs and down a corridor to a small boardroom. Along the main wall of the room were pinned about twenty portraits, mugshots of the young women I had seen downstairs. They held up race numbers below their faces like a line-up of suspects, except grinning exuberantly. In the boardroom I also encountered the program's head coach Martin Barras and its head physiologist David Martin. Both men were enthusiastic about explaining everything that was going on.



The traditional way we used to select was to just bring people here, and we're very well equipped to measure engines. So then, we'd just take the biggest engines we could find and then send them to Europe. What we found with that is that the success rate is roughly about 50 percent. We spend money to prepare an athlete for Europe, to get them to Europe, and then we'll find out usually within the first month whether they can cut it.

The change of culture, the fact that you suddenly have to look after yourself, the fact that your support network has been blown out of the water and the fact that you're not in five star hotels, you're travelling by cars for hours and hours on end and you get to a race and you're tired and you have to go out and perform. It's not glamorous. It's not Hollywood. And there's nothing in Australia that really prepares you for that. We're aiming to test physical resilience and most importantly mental resilience. To find people who are adaptable, so even if they don't have the skills, then, do they have the ability to learn the skills and learn them quick?

— Martin Barras

This is a selection camp where 20 of Australia's most talented young female cyclists were invited to vie for four spots on the Australian team to race in Europe. The fifth spot will go to the rider awarded the Amy Gillet scholarship for developing female cyclists. The final spot will go to an experienced rider already racing in Europe.

"Wake up Number Seven," a voice booms. "You have to get to the lab for your body composition scan at 6:00 am. Bring your urine sample with you."

Imagine yourself one of the aspiring cyclists. This is your morning wake-up call. A machine is strapped to your left arm that monitors your activity and metabolic rate. Strapped to your right arm is another machine recording your sleep patterns. You are filmed and photographed. You are fitted with surveillance equipment – voice recorders and wearable video cameras.

You respond to 'Number Seven' because that's the ID you were assigned for the duration of the camp. It corresponds to the paper number you display on yourself at all times. You were told in your induction lecture that you are being assessed

24 hours-a-day.



**AusDevelopmentTeam**

@AusDevTeam

Follow

Early start at selection camp - the @AusDevTeam athletes had blood tests, DEXA scans, skinfolds etc before breakfast.

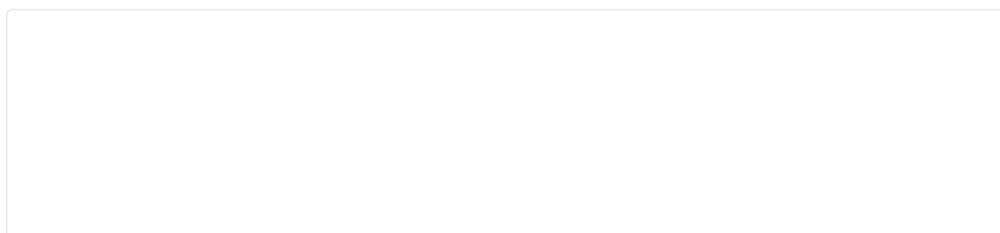
8:05 AM - 19 Apr 2015

1 4

Sometimes you receive a schedule for the day. Sometimes the schedule you receive is intentionally false. The activities you participate in are unashamedly extreme, designed to push you to your physical, psychological and emotional limits.

At the camp's halfway point, you are told to pack your bags ready to go home.

Eight participants have been asked to leave the room. You are amongst them. The remainder will be debriefed, told they have not made it to the next stage of selections. Photographs of this debrief are taken and posted publicly on twitter.





**AusDevelopmentTeam**

@AusDevTeam

Follow

The top row of 8 athletes continue [#SelectionCamp](#) - the bottom row of 10 didn't make it through the [#MidWayCut](#) today.

9:46 AM - 23 Apr 2015

6 3

You are one of the successful eight participants who have made the first cut.



**Rochelle Gilmore**

@RochelleGilmore

Follow

Tough day selecting 8 of 18 talented & inspiring women. They'll all achieve their dreams. [#MoreThanOnePathway](#) [#Go4It](#)

11:27 AM - 23 Apr 2015

4

18

The activities don't stop at morning skinfolds. One day you are given a map to the Brazilian embassy, along with a phrasebook and told you need to get there to fill out some paperwork and talk with important Brazilian dignitaries. You are in Italy, so you must direct your driver in Italian, whether you can speak it or not.

**davidtmartin**

@davidtmartin

[Follow](#)

Our visit to the Brazilian Embassy was so much fun! @Ausport women cycling challenge camp

8:00 AM - 24 Apr 2015

3

5

The next day you are dropped at a shopping centre with a set amount of cash and a time limit, instructed to source the most nutritious meal possible.

You sit written exams and complete assigned homework tasks, responding to complex hypothetical scenarios.

In another scenario, you are sent training on unfamiliar roads, with no idea of where or how long you must ride. As hail storms roll in and out, impromptu races are organised for you. Many of these are on dirt roads. You are riding your

road bike.

Eventually you are stopped. You are told you are beginning an individual time trial. You ask for directions and you are told you'll know when you cross the finish line and not before.

The time trial is a hilly 30km. The total ride is over six hours.

You and your fellow campers are split into groups. You have to race each other or play 'games' against each other. The winning team gets access to recovery facilities: plunge pools, compression equipment and massage. If you are in the losing group, you will wash everyone's bikes and Rochelle's car.



**AusDevelopmentTeam**  
@AusDevTeam

Follow

The first treat offered at #SelectionCamp however only for the winning TTT athletes today! Losers washed bikes :-)

10:31 PM - 23 Apr 2015

2 7

You are kept awake late into the night, every night, with meetings and emotionally draining debriefs and reflections. You are woken as early as 4:00 AM. At the most taxing stages of the camp, you are required to surrender your phone.

According to the staff and participants I spoke to, every scenario outlined above happened on the camp.

I've been told that a task for special forces military selection camps is to drop a team of soldiers into the middle of the ocean from a helicopter with nothing but the instructions 'swim to that boat'. The boat slowly sails away from the swimmers. The participants are not told how long they will be left swimming in the ocean, but they would be allowed to reach the boat after six hours or so. They would not be given any encouragement nor any feedback on their performance.

If this sounds like the women's selection camp, that's because the methods I saw in Canberra borrow heavily from this model.

I got into contact with Paul Cale, a former commando who trains Australian special forces troops for combat and has worked with special forces in the USA. He collaborated with Barras and Martin to design the women's cycling selection camp. He explained that the theory behind "silent running" – the process of not providing any positive or negative feedback to the athletes – is to teach and assess true determination and resilience. The women on the camp never got much as a thumbs up.

“

This is not recruit training. What we're looking for [in special forces] is tactical athletes. This is taking that methodology and making it relevant to the specific task of cycling in Europe. Other sports are starting to apply these methodologies to their specific needs, basketball and the combat sports in Australia. I would say cycling was the first.

— Paul Cale

If you think it sounds like a reality TV show, you're not alone. That's one avenue of commercialisation Rochelle Gilmore is pursuing. At the camp she had in a camera crew in tow, compiling a preview and pilot to potentially sell to TV

networks. Television time is hard to come by in women's cycling. This novel approach could conceivably break through that barrier.

The current funding model for the camp involves scientific research, being run in conjunction with the camp. The studies using the camp's participants as subjects contribute to the running costs and make the enterprise viable.

If you think it sounds like a paternalistic torture camp, you're not alone there either. There has been a swathe of criticism of the approach, generally focussing on the extreme nature of the methods used and differences between how men's and women's teams are selected.

I have found the loudest supporters of the camp to be the participants themselves, and not just the successful athletes but those who didn't make it through. I decided to contact a number of the athletes, to find out about the challenges from the inside. However, with the nature of the selections that are still in process I decided to keep them anonymous. The anonymity was my decision. The riders were generally happy to be named.

“

Some people [participating] think it's a bit silly. I think if you go in with that mindset its harder. No other training or race is going to knock you down the way the camp does. It definitely makes you a lot stronger and you learn a lot about yourself and how you deal with different situations when you are tired. I think that they are improving it and making it more specific. I feel like if you make it through a camp like this you are ready to go over and try give Europe a crack.

— Participant, identity withheld.

“

I was one of the only riders who the coaches didn't know at all. It was my chance to prove myself without politics, preconceptions or luck, and I earned my scholarship fairly.

— Gracie Elvin, former camp selectee, now current Orcia-AIS rider, and two time Australian Road Race Champion.

“

Change is always confronting. We have less inhibition in the women's program because we have a less established culture. The sport is newer, it's smaller, it's still developing, so it's like a big company and a small company. A small company can take the risks that a big company can't. The same process would work equally well for men, absolutely. We didn't invent it. We reshaped the methodology specifically for cycling, but we did not invent the concept of selection camp as it is. We borrowed it from special forces.

— Martin Barras

The details of the camp initially seem mysterious, but interviewing Gilmore, Barras, Martin and Cale, I learned there was no secrecy, only pride. On the issue of gender, Gilmore pointed out that for women their first time cycling in Europe means a lot of challenges that are not the same for men given the more established nature of the men's professional cycling. Gilmore said the camp had to select the best team for the specific emotional and psychological challenges of the environment women face upon entering elite women's racing in Europe.



**AusDevelopmentTeam**

@AusDevTeam

Follow

These talented [@AusDevTeam](#) athletes endured [#SelectionCamp](#) & will follow a structured path to Pro Cycling in Europe!

10:38 AM - 26 Apr 2015

Martin, who works with Australia's best male cyclists too, suggested that the concept is unlikely to be adopted by men's programs only because talented male athletes would simply walk out. He didn't imagine they were likely to submit to a challenging program when there are plenty of other places they will be praised and pampered no matter what behaviour and attitude they display.

“

You discover your own strengths and weaknesses. The coach gets incredible insight into the athletes and team. It is also a shared experience and that establishes a culture for the team to be effective when they go to Europe

— Paul Cale

With Martin I had the opportunity to go over the finer points of how the riders physiology and performance aspects are analyzed. Martin seems to be one of the real grandfathers of sports physiology worldwide. He stepped me through the approach to combining extensive lab testing with varied on-road performance parameters.

Martin and Barras are conducting controlled testing to score the riders power-to-weight outputs and then cross referencing those results with a number of on-road time trials, both flat and up-hill. The result is a sophisticated, multidimensional scoring that offers more detailed and reliable insight into each athlete's abilities than any single physiological metric such as a Vo2 max test. All of that is before they even start looking at the mental attitude aspects, which they approach with a similar precision.

“

Whenever you make a character assessment of a rider there's an element of science to it. We do have grids and the grids are based on psychological studies that have been done so you say okay, this is how you frame the challenge and this is how you interpret the response to it. You try to remove the subjectivity as much as possible, but it is never 100 percent. It's taking that gut feeling out of it and trying to replace it as much as possible with certainty, that's essentially what we're doing here.

— Martin Barras

Despite my expectations, the camp was not a bunch of cigar-smoking, fedora-wearing gents putting the ladies through their paces. It's a concept that has alarmed me for years now. From the outside, selection camp seemed founded on a philosophy informed by stereotypes of female athletes. It seemed too much like careless surveillance and oblivious torment of women for the purpose of weeding out potentially hysterical and insubordinate ones, like measuring "drama-per-hour" or "whingeing-per-kilometre" on top of watts-per-kilo.

That male cyclists only seem required to demonstrate racing performances whilst assessing women requires a contrived environment to assess their behaviour and decorum didn't sit well with me. It unsettled me too that the domestic women's teams and races were being considered such a basket case that the results of the National Road Series were being overlooked but a skills session around witches hats on a synthetic hockey field in Canberra was vital. I was disillusioned that a program of anointing a lucky few individuals with an artificial fast-track to the top of the sport was deemed more appropriate than resourcing grassroots teams to bridge the competitive divide themselves.

If I have gained anything from my all access tour of the facilities during selection camp, it is the knowledge that my suspicion and discomfort was valid but misdirected. The selection process for the Australian women's development team is strange and extreme for sure, but I can see perfectly why it needs to be. Any Australian woman wanting to represent her country at the top level of international road cycling is faced with a cruel and brutal challenge. Camp aims to replicate the challenges these women will face.

I would still hope that as the camp process evolves the methodology will develop a greater sensitivity to the dehumanisation aspects and more effectively display the respect I could see its staff has for its athletes. The culture of the place was not one of cherry-picking the most docile bodies to mould into robots as I feared it could be. It was clear to me that what drove the whole thing was a mindset of scientific best-practice and a reverence for the exceptional toughness and determination to achieve in spite of adversity. After encountering the women tackling the camp themselves, it is also obvious to me that the selectors will find what they are looking for. I look forward to seeing the results.

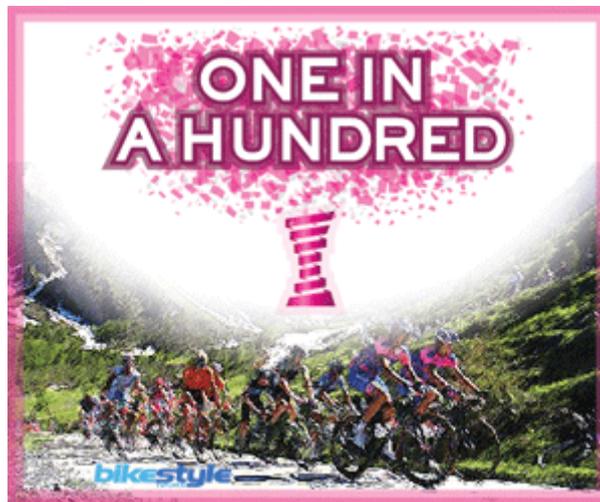
## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

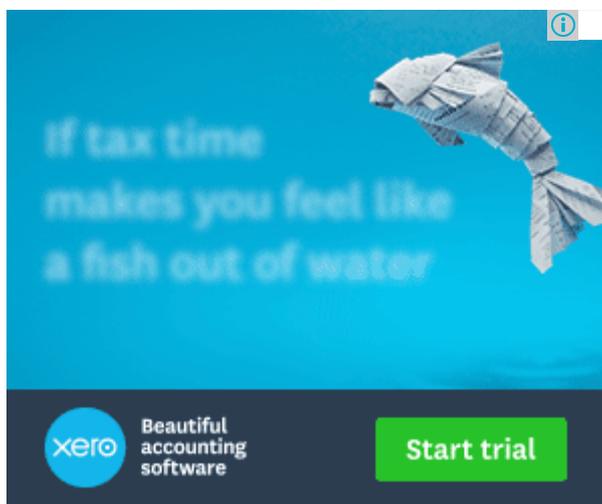
*Tom is a former pro cyclist, now Managing Pat's Veg Cycling, a men's development team. He also works for Drapac Professional Cycling, a men's pro cycling team. Tom is passionate about women's cycling and enjoys following and writing about women in the cycling world. He says "It's weird that people think that's weird." Tom is based in Canberra where he is completing a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, Sociology, Political Science, English and Anthropology at the Australian National University.*

2



Tags: AIS, AIS Selection Camp, Australian Institute of Sport, Dave Martin, High-5 Development Team, Martin Barras, rochelle gilmore





63 Comments

CyclingTips

Login ▾

Recommend

Share

Sort by Oldest ▾



Join the discussion...



**xponti** • a year ago

What a great insight. I love how Rochelle thinks as well. Commercialising the selection process into a possible tv show. Use the participants as study guinea pigs. All of this thinking outside the box to get women's cycling moving forward.

Rochelle is truly a woman to be admired for what she is doing for her sport.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**bigstu\_** • a year ago

Whatever it takes - that philosophy worked out great for Essendon. The Stated primary aim is to create a scheme that is revenue generating. The second is to increase the percentage of those that can stick it out longer than a month in Europe. If there is a problem with lack of support in Europe then funding for a support officer buddy system in Europe would be a good idea, but not as glamorous, so not as good for ratings. But local contacts/management/support are what male hopefuls going to Europe for the last fifty years have had so what would they know.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Tom Palmer** → **bigstu\_** • a year ago

Unlike essendon. Revenue generation in this case is about survival. This program was dead in the water, canned altogether, before Rochelle and High-5 were interested.

I think the support officer idea is strong, for my view there is always more room for athlete support. This selection process is necessitated by the abusing nature of what women face when heading to Europe to race. I'm probably not ready to suggest if that hardship is the Australian program's fault, it is definitely the reality of women's cycling's position generally but maybe the program should be there to

The extreme methods and measures at the Australian women's development team selection camp | Ella  
 or women's cycling's position generally, but maybe the program should be there to  
 mediate, rather than accept it.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Andrea Willbe** → Tom Palmer · a year ago

you hit a very important point - pro-cyclists have SUPPORT. Telling women to train to be their own support instead of garnering the corporate dollars male cyclists get for support is self biased women acting against their own self best interest AGAIN!! Does cycling and racing and the spirit get you nothing for all that effort???!!! Real pro-cyclists are the laziest blokes ever because they do not spend any energy other than on the bike. They have support/wives/slaves/maids/masseuses/ and will do anything corporately necessary to get that corporate branding and support including lying about taking banned substances. The lie must continue so they don't have to give up support because with no support there is no time to focus on performance.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**velocite** · a year ago

I'd pay money to take part in a program like that.

On the other hand, to have a government-financed machine like that devoted to sport, any sport, I find incongruous. Not grown-up.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tom Palmer** → velocite · a year ago

It's interesting.

From the perspective of fairness, this is the most comprehensive, most objective selection process I've seen.

Professional team selections are far from fair - plenty of what's generally considered 'Professional' in this cycling industry rider selection I think would be totally unacceptable by standards of a publicly funded program. That's probably not exclusive to sport either - private/public sector hiring policies for example.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**velocite** → Tom Palmer · a year ago

Ah, great issue. How to select an employee or team member for success? For an ordinary job, with it's mixture of drudgery and chaos, it's difficult, a bit of a lucky dip. I still recall the 'three things your company expects' as related by my human relations lecturer: (1) be there (2) look right and (3) service beyond the call of duty. But it ought to be easier to choose the person in the more narrowly defined 'job' of cycling, yes? But I recall reading somewhere that Cavendish's raw power numbers wouldn't have you hire him, so evidently that's not enough. And reading Al Hinds' commentary on Richie Porte, as highlighted by today's Rocacorba(!) illustrates how much room there is for telling stories. Rabbit rabbit, I'm rambling here..

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Paolo** · a year ago



Paolo · a year ago

Don't they do this for a few years now? Any significant results yet? Very difficult to find "the one" in camps like this i think. They look for the "complete package", which usually the great ones don't have. Cav and the stories about his tests being the prime example.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Jessi Braverman** → Paolo · a year ago

I guess it depends on how you define "the one" - Gracie Elvin came out of this camp as did Katrin Garfoot, Chloe McConville and Bec Wiasak (just off the top of my head). Edit to add: Loren Rowney and Rachel Neylan (both 2011).

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Paolo** → Jessi Braverman · a year ago

"The one" would be at least Oenone Wood level. Not someone who gets a result here and there and fills up the bunch most of the time.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Dave** → Paolo · a year ago

I thought the aim of the selection camp was not to find 'the one' but to find a squad of cyclists who would not only be viable racers but also tough enough to not chuck it in and head back to Australia after a few weeks in Europe.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Matt DeMaere** → Paolo · a year ago

Pretty sure the AIS model hasn't changed in 20 years. Imported from the Eastern block of the 80s, the basis of which is "Throw the eggs against the wall and see which didn't break" method. There are lots of examples where athletes didn't score highly in the AIS system and went on to become some of Australia's best cyclists. Does putting these aspirants through the wringer really generate greater odds of success? To my mind, much of the motivation for this process is simply assurance, within an expensive and bureaucratic system. Satisfying that system isn't the same as directly developing athletes.

Have they ever taken all those rejected athletes and coached them in parallel, then comparatively assessed whether their process is effective? No, the money is simply not there -- being the biggest reason the process exists in the first place -- so on it goes, developed in the absence of controls.

Looking at those Eastern-block countries from the era, even coming up to more modern times, there was/is a desperate motivation to escape the predicament of what lies in store for the of ordinary life. The approach ends up being somewhat of a mill. I'm not sure it is justified in a wealthy country, such as Australia, where a dedicated young person has many choices for fulfilling life.

A TV show, as suggested above, seems horribly exploitive and down there amongst Ninja Warrior and Wipeout.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Tom Palmer** → Matt DeMaere · a year ago



This is probably more sophisticated than the old 'eggs at the wall'. It's like squeezing them to see which ones crack easily so you do don't bother hurling them at the wall in the first place.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tom Palmer** → Paolo · a year ago

I don't reckon Cav would have made the final eight on this camp. But I think Aussies like Jack Bobridge, Michael Matthews, Luke Durbridge, Caleb Ewan would have completely thrived.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Paolo** → Tom Palmer · a year ago

Hard to tell. Unfortunately Bobridge is not really a benchmark, Durbridge still has a point to prove in the WT, Matthews didn't need a camp like this and Ewan is special, but has been "pampered" so far. But, the point is that one of the greatest sprinters in history, a road world champ wouldn't have made the selection, and that;s the one you would try to find.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Dave** → Paolo · a year ago

I agree that Cycling Australia has a problem with the system backing certain "chosen ones" for reasons completely unknown to mere mortals. Ewan is definitely a Chosen One, and it will be interesting to see if his progression continues or if he tops out at "good for a young kid" level, while Durbridge is a good example of a Chosen One who is not getting the results.

They definitely have them on the women's side of the sport too.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Mike** → Dave · a year ago

Durbridge is not getting the results because he is so damn good, the team makes him ride in service of others because he has the biggest engine anyone has ever seen. When you have a guy that can do the job of 4 people, you ride him and keep the rest of the team fresh. Bike racing is not only what comes up in the SBS highlights reel.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Dave** → Mike · a year ago

But he was supposed to be the world's next great time trial rider and classics contender.

What went wrong was the same thing that affects so many hopefuls from Australia in so many sports - it's hard to be king of the jungle when you grow up in a koala park.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Gavin Adkins** · a year ago

Like Tom, I am also suspicious and discomforted by this process. This article is very

helpful in shedding some light on what is actually going on.

However, good intentions are not enough.

While there has been significant and ongoing improvement, Australian cycling has a long and unfortunate history of chewing up athletes and spitting them out. I think this is a significant reason why people who have been involved in the sport for a long time are uncomfortable with this program. That discomfort is significantly increased when these concerns, from people experienced in the grass-roots development of racing cyclists for many years, are essentially dismissed out of hand.

To say that special forces do it, so we have borrowed and adapted it, to me, is sorely lacking in the rigour required when you are quite openly pushing people to physical and mental breaking point. What happens to the eliminated athletes?

Where is the evidence, beyond anecdotal assertion, that this works?

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Jessi Braverman** → Gavin Adkins · a year ago

We have a story coming from one of the eliminated athletes coming early next week. Stay tuned to this space for that!

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**megabicycleta** → Jessi Braverman · a year ago

I'd love to hear from some of the women who completed the camp several years ago, with the benefit of more time to consider its effects on their career over the span of a few years. Both those who were successful, and those who weren't.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Jessi Braverman** → megabicycleta · a year ago

We have that in the works now, too! Coming at you early next week.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Andrea Willbe** → megabicycleta · a year ago

You go too hard too fast too often you burn up and don't come back and they don't even know why. It's called stress.

What's with the training demand: "Now go and do a lap as hard and as fast as you can" - trying to beat records...what bullshit. How to burn out a kid. Then they drop cycling because they're young - strong yes and a coach may get his or her lower and lower times - afterall coaching is about faster and faster right? Wrong-oh Pal! Coaches like this make me sick...how to stick it to the kids by making them suffer too much. The fact is the further you go the more you slow down...you learn to stick it when it needs to be stuck...and learning when that is is a skill that comes with time. But mostly you'd be burnt out by bad coaching before you ever get to that point. Shitty coaches make me sick how you kill off what coulda been. Take heed young ladies and young cyclists...most coaches are full of shit. If they don't know THE CYCLISTS TRAINING BIBLE by

Joe Friel and Lance Armstrong's training smarter not harder books then they are irrelevant.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tom Palmer** → Gavin Adkins · a year ago

True: if we're calling this approach a success what is the control group?

Hard not to think AIS/Rochelle/High-5/Cycling Australia conglomerate = total monopoly over women's development pathways. Whatever cruel an unusual process they pick will automatically be the best because it will get the best (maybe only) riders

Some evidence of alternative pathways:

- > Bec Wiasak was not selected by this camp, and won a road world championship. I have a feeling she'll find her way into the program without the camp.
- > Chloe Hosking funded herself into Europe, Signed pro, gained plenty of national team selections that way.

I'd watch Kimberley Wells, who hit a lot of dead ends before getting 'with the program'

2013 - won an aussie title out of nowhere - no selection so went to America and won nearly everything she started.

2014 - went to Europe off her own bat with a french team. Injury and illness, no doubt exacerbated by lack of support, cut season short

2015 - finally went to the camp and has made final eight,

(also national crit champ, winning NRS stages, winning everything, it's hard to imagine what kind of selection process would not select her)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Andrea Willbe** → Gavin Adkins · a year ago

Stress....it comes in all forms at all tempo's. If you train smarter instead of harder and have a rock solid supportive personal life (wife/slave/maid) and a rock solid support management then maybe a cyclist can get muled out but not burn out.

Some age groupers are still going. Look at Lance Armstrong....I found his personal life and his mother's love and support his greatest gift...without base you can't face the race.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Thomas** → Gavin Adkins · a year ago

Not going to lie, I find this a really disturbing exercise. As much as I love Rochelle Gilmore this is one programme I struggle to support. The inherent cruelty of it is just not on. If they're suggesting that riding for some teams is like that then that's more a statement about the sport and should be a warning sign to the governing body...

I've had several friends go through this over the last few years, some have even made the cut. I still can't get over it. I remember reading about an early version of it where when they were desperate for a drink, athletes were given bottle full of cement.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Jessi Braverman** · a year ago

Further reading from athletes on their experiences at selection camp:  
Gracie Elvin just shared her blog post from 2011 selection camp:

<http://www.gracieelvin.com/bur...>

We have this piece from Tessa Fabry from last year: <http://cyclingtips.com.au/2013...>  
Ella columnist Verita Stewart attended selection camp - and she's writing about her experience for us in her next column.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Matt de Neef** Mod → Jessi Braverman · a year ago

And another here, from Lauren Perry: <http://www.pelotonwatch.com/fe...>

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**RayG** → Matt de Neef · a year ago

I'll have to admit starting this and thinking 'how many times can this be covered?' (Lisa Jacobs also covered it in her blog), but it was written from such a different perspective (not as a participant) and with a good critical eye, that it was worth doing again. Good to see a new slant on an old topic.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Jessi Braverman** → RayG · a year ago

Think it's worth noting that we're hoping Ella is attracting a new audience in addition to the readers that have been following this all along, so there are some things you may hear about that sound like the same old, same old to you but might be completely new to someone else. Regardless - happy to hear you got something out of this angle!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**RayG** → Jessi Braverman · a year ago

At least you probably won't trot out yet another story about leg shaving.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Thomas** → Matt de Neef · a year ago

I think those differing account actually say more about the age of the participants than about their experience.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Robert Merkel** · a year ago

Some great writing by Tom.

Two thoughts, not really put together into a particular thesis:

a) Without Andrew Christie-Johnson, how successful would men's "grassroots racing in Australia" look as a development pathway? (Not criticising the good intentions of the Drapac organization, but the actual track record isn't spectacular.)

b) The selection camp process has identified a number of fine athletes, but no world

The extreme methods and measures at the Australian women's development team selection camp | Ella  
 by THE SELECTION CAMP PROCESS HAS IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF THE ATHLETES, BUT NO WORK  
 beaters yet. Compare with men's road cycling, both inside and outside the AIS.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tom Palmer** → Robert Merkel · a year ago

It's very hard to imagine telling Andrew Christie Johnson, that the race results he invests so heavily and successfully in helping his riders get in Australia and across the globe are pointless. Imagine saying that instead they will have to come to Canberra for judo classes and language tests to assess their aptitude.

Men's high performance program and domestic teams are not mutually exclusive, the world tour academy, the U23 program and the track endurance program all rely, and collaborate with the teams back home.

I for example raced U23 for Australia on a Drapac bike and I got there on a flight I bought with my Drapac salary.

Also it's not just ACJ at Avanti kicking goals for the sport, There's Budget Forklifts, Search 2 Retain, Charter Mason, African Wildlife Safaris, Navitas, Pat's Veg Cycling, and others, all there to back up the high performance system from behind. - Not sure how the women's scene will achieve that soon.

Drapac is in the business of actually offering pro-contracts. It's the buyer at this auction, not the agent. It signed more new Australian Pros than anyone else in the last last few years, but to itself not its competitor teams. (conflict of interest disclaimer... ha ha)

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**ginga\_ninja** · a year ago

I love Tom Palmer's articles, always well researched, considered and articulate. Thanks Tom. Also very interesting to get more of an "inside" view from this camp. I can see the reasoning behind wanting to find both mentally and physically tough athletes and I know we're talking about the very Elite end of cycling but I agree with other posters: do these chosen cyclists actually succeed in the sport in the longer term (I know many do but some don't) and what about the eliminated athletes? They're all exceptional athletes to be chosen to be at the camp in the first place. Some camp "rejects" have gone on to successful "pro" cycling careers (e.g. Loren Rowney). Could different development approaches be used to further their international careers rather than put the screws on for a specific 2 week period, once a year? Less bang for buck if done another way? Matt DeMaere: "Have they ever taken those rejected athletes and coached them in parallel?..." I would like to see the results of that!

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Kevin T.** · a year ago

I get the 'testing resilience' part, but not the 'public shaming on social media' aspect. If cut, why create shame around the experience? Good tv? At what cost to the individual?

I'm genuinely interested in reading about the support offered to those athletes who find themselves ejected from this process. It's all well and good for CA to claim "Well, special forces commandos get selected this way, and look how awesome they are." but we mustn't forget the armed forces have military funding to draw their counselling services from. What does Cycling Aust do? I suspect it's a little less comprehensive.

I'm a Level 2 coach with CA and have been employed by the Aus Sporting commission

The extreme methods and measures at the Australian women's development team selection camp | Ella  
 I'm a Level 2 coach with CA and have been employed by the Aus Sporting Commission, btw. I understand how results dictate funding. In my opinion, no result is worth the destruction of a persons self-esteem. There's too much of that in the world already. My suggestion: cut Anna Meares' financial support in half. You could fund a whole womens' NRS team with that and Meares would still win anyway. I'm only half joking...

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Tom Palmer** → Kevin T. · a year ago

I understand there is some ongoing consultation with the ejected riders. They are certainly provided with detailed feedback on how they performed, and where to improve etc. Also there's no limit to how many times they can attempt.

I think that the staff themselves see no shame in failing, and don't want to hide any aspect of the camp, so they militate against secrecy. The coaches and scientists seem to have a "we'll tell anyone who's interested" kind attitude, but public interest in the camp is a new thing. With commercial partners now interested, there's a twitter account.

I think the argument could be made that HP programs could support the NRS without directly paying Anna's funding money, but instead by simply making NRS central to selection policy. Maybe look at track racing for evidence, the track races that count for selection to High Performance programs are the only ones in Australia that attract decent fields. A small industry of track racing is built around almost nothing but high performance programs. at the top end too Riders like Cameron Meyer and Luke Durbridge have altered their seasons to come to Aus to race Oceania Championships for selection purposes. Maybe making NRS the selection pool is a way to bolster that racing to the point where its results will be a reliable reflection of readiness for Europe... The chicken and the egg...

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Kev T** → Tom Palmer · a year ago

Thanks for the reply. I totally agree with your bemusement at NRS races being undervalued as a performance indicator and selecting tool. Probably because it is a system outside of the coaches control whereas the track championships are largely under the influence of institutes and the AIS. I do know that emerging U/19 road scholarship holders are encouraged by selectors to stick with track because of the recognised progression from track to the various national teams (with AC-J athletes often being an exception, E.g. Haig, Clements, Flakemore). Having a full time career outside of cycling whilst I was coaching, I often viewed some (not all) of the federation coaches' strategies as coach-centric rather than athlete focused. I.e. their tactics justified their own positions, rather than advanced those of the athletes The women' selection camp seems entirely driven by that philosophy.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**Nath** · a year ago

Another great article from Tom. Insightful and well constructed arguments with great prose thrown in as well. Cyclingtips/Ella should be getting this guy on board full-time.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Jules** • a year ago

this camp sounds like fun. my best results always come in races that are a test of attrition. I am a patient, masochistic and physically ungifted cyclist. I totally see the value in breaking the candidates to see what they're made of. this isn't a school pageant where everyone gets a medal.

[^](#) | [v](#) • [Reply](#) • [Share](#) ›**Mark** • a year ago

Another good article from Tom. I would like to

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Subscribe to the newsletter for exclusive content, deals & events.

[\*\*SUBSCRIBE\*\*](#)

## CYCLINGTIPS

[About Us](#)[Advertise](#)[Meet the Team](#)[Contact](#)

## LEGAL

[Editorial Policy](#)[Privacy Policy](#)[Terms & Conditions](#)

## SOCIAL

