



From couch potato, to Coast to Coast

Danielle Anderson, heading to the start line of the Coast to Coast

This year's Coast to Coast multi-sport event brought a record 197 female entries in the male dominated race and for one such entrant this was a two and a half year transition, from an overweight, high cholesterol sufferer, to a much slimmed down athlete, tackling the biggest multisport event in the world. **LORRAINE THOMSON** finds out anyone can do the gruelling 243km Coast to Coast if they put their heart and soul in to it.

Danielle Anderson, 31, admits she was a typical couch potato. Just over two years ago she weighed in at 97.5kg and not surprisingly was suffering from high cholesterol. After deciding healthy was the only way to go, Danielle set herself the ultimate goal, to compete in the 2008 Speight's Coast to Coast. Now weighing just 75kg, she can add Coast to Coast to her list of achievements. An incredible feat and one that demonstrates anyone can really achieve

what ever they set out to.

"I have pushed myself out of my comfort zone more times than I care to remember while training for the Coast to Coast, says Danielle. "It's certainly not an easy road to take for someone who couldn't run 500 metres, but I'm not going to give up. Entering the Speight's Coast to Coast has awakened in me a passion for health and fitness. I'm addicted."

As a two-day individual entrant, Danielle had to run 36km across

the Southern Alps, kayak 67km of the grade two Waimakariri River and cycle 140km. The start line was on Kumara Beach on the West Coast of the South Island and the finishing line was at Sumner Beach in Christchurch. Danielle took 19 hours and six minutes, receiving 44th place out of 79 women in the two-day individual category. The whole experience, she says, was "fantastic".

"It was long and hard, but I loved it. I just kept pushing on and it was such a buzz, even though I was in the lower half of the finishers."

When not at home in Red Beach [North Auckland], or out training for events, or studying for a Diploma in Psychology, Danielle can be found working in administration and human resources for a dental software company in Albany.

Despite her accomplished goal, Danielle says she is not a natural athlete.

"I used to have a couple of natural talents, piano and ballet, when I was at primary school. I also played hockey a little bit. I played right back, so I didn't have to do much."

Danielle still insists she is naturally lazy and that she used to have the view: "If it is hard work, I probably won't do it. It got easier to just not do anything."

But when the weight piled on and she got a letter from her medical centre [following a test] saying she had "extremely high cholesterol", it was suggested she do some exercise and change her diet.

In London at the time, she joined up with a local gym at St John's Community Centre and also changed her diet. On the way back to New Zealand, she set one of her first physical goals, to climb Mt Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa. Although she claims to have not been very fit, she still managed to do the six-day trek.

Back in New Zealand she entered a Special K Triathlon in 2005 and the events started to snowball from there.

Along with husband Doug, she started mountain biking and rock climbing, although claims she was "bad at both".

It was not long, however, before she went down the multisport route, thinking there was a little bit more of a challenge in it. Now she is addicted, having completed ten multisport events over the past year. The hardest mentally was The Coromandel Classic held over two days and The Motu one-day event in Opotoki. These were all stepping stones for the Coast to Coast. But the path has not been easy.

"It is hard to motivate yourself some days when



First day, changing from the bike to the run



Second day, kayak to ride transition



you are tired and sore, but my husband does like to prod me."

Preparing herself for the ultimate event, saw Danielle out training six days a week, sometimes twice a day. Friday was her only day off.

"I like Fridays."

She also enjoyed much help along the way.

"My trainers have been very supportive of me. The guys at Lifestyle Fitness have worked out an arrangement with me."

Danielle works out at Scene One in the city and also at the Apollo Centre in Albany. Theo Chapple works out her discipline training plan, Dean Coker her conditioning and Nikki Hart her nutrition. Then she has a masseuse, osteo therapist and neuromuscular therapist.

The costs, needless to say, have been mounting up. A new bike, travel to events, trainers, entry fees, familiarisation trips to the course and nutritional supplements. Danielle expects she has spent \$15,000 over the past two and a half years.

She has, however, received much family support.

"Mum keeps telling me how proud she is and my husband is very



Across the finish line, with medal and liquid prize

supportive, although he has bigger plans, like climbing in Nepal."

Support crew for the Coast to Coast, included her husband, mum, dad and a friend:

Not stopping at this mammoth challenge, Danielle is coming back next year to do the same event over one day [instead of two]. She finds the race itself not the hard part, but the lead up to it and the body changes – to hormones, metabolic rate, muscle growth and body stress.

"I cannot drink alcohol any more because my body reacts to it, so it is not worth it."

On a strictly low glycaemic index (GI) diet, one of the spinoffs has been the weight loss. Another has been stepping outside her comfort zone.

"It has taught me that it is OK to step out of your comfort zone, that it is a good thing and that you lose out on so much if you do not. You do not know if you do not try."

Asked if she will keep up the fitness, Danielle does not hesitate before saying, "definitely".

"I need to be fit for my health and well being. I do not want to get fat again."

In the interim, before next year's Coast to Coast, Danielle says she would like to take some time off her Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge time, but does not have any immediate plans for the rest of the year.

"I need to be fit for my health and well being. I do not want to get fat again."