

## Rider Chat with Pua Sawicki

This week we bring you newly crowned US 24 Hour National Champion Pua Sawicki (Ellsworth). Pua put together a lights out ride last weekend in Wausau, Wisconsin to take her second consecutive Stars and Stripes jersey by two laps over her nearest competitor. Ultra-Endurance isn't her only talent though, Sawicki is part of a special breed of mountain bikers who can succeed at high intensity Cross Country events as well as the slow burning Ultra-Endurance competitions. Read more to see what makes this American athlete so unique.



**MTBraceneWS-** How/when did you start mountain bike riding/racing?

**Pua Sawicki-** I started out as a roadie/triathlete and finally picked up a friend's mountain bike while I was still living in Hawaii. I was in no way a mountain biker, but I think it was in 2001 that I did the 24 Hours of Hell in Paradise in Kualoa Ranch, Hawaii on a team. That was it for my mountain biking until I decided to pick up and move to the mainland. After graduating from Chaminade University in 2002 I was off to Southern California to just explore. After about a month, I ended up meeting Ron (now my husband) on a mountain bike ride and I have not got off the dirt since. We began doing some adventure racing together and in 2004, we decided to head to the Nationals and give the Marathon (it was the first year that this discipline came out) a shot. And that is how it all began.

**MTBraceneWS-** What is your favorite trail to ride?

**PS-** This is a tough question. I do not think I could give you one trail that I love the most. Because we live on the road and see so many incredible places, I have favorite trails in so many different places. But, if I had to choose a favorite place, I would have to say Park City, Utah.

**MTBraceneWS-** What is your favorite race? Not because you have done well there, but the most enjoyable because of course/promoters/other racers,etc.

**PS-** It would have to be the 24 Hours of Hell in Paradise that takes place on the island of Oahu in Kualoa Ranch. This is where many movies were filmed, including Jurassic Park and it is gorgeous. The race is based in the green grass that takes you right into the dirt roads and trails. It is about a 5 mile loop that heads to the back of the valley and when you are on the singletrack heading back to the start/finish you can look up and see the crystal blue ocean. It is a race that defines grass roots. The race is put on by one guy, Mr. Scott Chaney. He is

always the first one there and the last one to leave. When you drive up on race morning, you pull into the grass and pick any spot you want and take up as much space as you want. Each team is given a letter and the rule is that when you roll through the start/finish, you yell your letter and say "in" and your teammate takes off and yells your letter and says "out." Each time you come in and go out on your lap, it will be Scott sitting on his little chair with his clipboard on his lap. He will be sitting there for the whole 24 hours, except for right before sunset. When the sun is starting to set, he hands the clipboard over to one of the racers on one of the teams and gives him the job to sit in the chair until he gets back. This is when he takes a 5 mile walk around the course and places glow sticks along the way. As soon as he gets back, he is back in his chair with the clipboard back in his lap. When the race is done, he goes over to the lanai area and gives out the awards and raffles off the prizes. Then finally, when everyone is cleaning up and going home he is heading back out for his 5 mile walk around the course to clean up what markings are left. During the event you can take a little hike or spin over to where the giant dinosaur footprints from Jurassic Park are and hang out at everyone's camps, and while you are doing your lap you have to watch out for the cattle that is out on the course. You never know when one might jump out on the trail or when the cattle will decide that the best place to graze is right in the middle of the dirt road that takes you right into the venue. It is a special place with special people and truly represents what mountain biking is all about.



**MTBraceneWS-** Where is your hometown and where do you currently primarily reside?

**PS-** This question is a little tougher. My home is a 40' Fifth Wheel that goes where ever we go. When people ask where we live, we always say "here." Whenever we are driving somewhere, I take a look back at our truck and there is our house. It is nice to have your home following you around, but trust me, when your house rolls, things can get a little interesting. Although we are on the road for most of the year, I do still call my hometown Mililani, Hawaii. This is where I was born and raised and where my family is and we get back as often as possible.

**MTBraceneWS-** Do you train with a coach, if so, who?



PS- Yes, I do train with a coach and he is amazing. My coach is Dr. Brandon Grove who has his own practice in Huntington Beach, California. He is Ron's best friend and one of the smartest people I have ever met. It began back in 2004 when Ron asked him if he would be interested in coaching me, because we wanted to see what would happen if I tried to start racing. He agreed and things have only gotten better through the years. I am his only athlete at the moment, but he is looking to expand in the

coaching world when he settles down with his practice and 3 little boys.

MTBracenevs- How do you balance training for traditional cross country races and ultra-endurance events?

PS- At the moment, my training is primarily focused on endurance. I do throw in some speed work, but I need to be able to keep on pedaling as the hours go by and that is what we have focused on. I have started doing more of the cross-country races and using that as my speed work and experience to help me in endurance. Even though I sit in my saddle and pedal for 24 hours, I have realized and felt a huge difference when I bring in what I have gained from cross-country racing.

MTBracenevs- Is there a specific type of racing that you going to focus on in the future and why?

PS- I am not sure how to answer this question and it is a little hard to answer at the moment. I absolutely love doing everything, from short track to 24 hours, it is all fun for me. I would love to continue with the endurance and cross-country if I could. We are going to have to wait and see how the schedule unfolds for next year and make some difficult decisions.

MTBracenevs- What is your best trait as a racer? What is something that you are working on?

PS- I think I would have to say that my best trait as a racer would be climbing. The thing that I have been trying to work on and need to continue working on is definitely my starts. The other thing would be super techy, rooty descents (mt. snow, vermont).

MTBraceneWS- Who is your favorite racer on the US circuit today and why?

PS- Shonny Vanlandingham. I realize she is not exactly on the MTB US circuit, but she is doing XTERRA and shows up when she can. I have gotten to know her through the years and we respect everything that she has done, who she is and how she has represented herself. She is an amazing athlete and truly a great person and I respect that.



MTBraceneWS- Why do you choose mountain biking over other cycling disciplines (road racing)?

PS- If I could, I would be doing everything. I am only one person and can only do so much and we decided that right now, mountain biking is where we should be. Although, I had to turn down a spot in the Ironman World Championships twice in the past and I am determined to one day make that my focus and become an Ironman.

MTBraceneWS- What is something interesting about you that most people do not know?

PS- This is something that I do not even know if it is true, but my husband says that I make squeaky or mumbling noises in my sleep. I have never been awake to experience it, so I am not sure if he is lying, but that is something no one would know.

MTBraceneWS- What are your future mountain biking goals?

PS- To be able to find the funding that would allow me to compete against the best racers at the International level in both endurance and cross country.

MTBraceneWS- What is the coolest experience you have ever had related to mountain biking?

PS- Starting a Keiki (kids) team. They are the future of our sport and are so fun and amazing. With the help of our sponsors, I was able to start the team this year and provide the Keikis with the feel of a team, a support system and positive influence. It has been the coolest experience to get out to a race and be their support crew, cheer them on, go for a ride with them, be racing on the same race course as they are, exchange emails, answer their questions and have them share their experiences with me. It is small way for me to hopefully make a small difference and I hope that I am able to have it continue to grow.

MTBraceneWS- How does your team, sponsors, and support systems help you achieve your

goals?

PS- I have always been so blessed to have the best support systems. From the beginning when I was playing soccer at age 10 and throughout all my sports and competitions until I left Hawaii, my parents were my biggest support system. They have always supported me in everything I wanted to get my hands into as long as I followed through on my end and it is because of them that I was able to grow into who I am today. Then when I left home, moved to the mainland, met and married Ron, I was blessed with another amazing support system. He is always there for me, has taught me a ton and is a huge part in any success that I have. We are truly a team and because we have a great team, it works. He does love to race and when he does he definitely holds his ground (he was the 2004 30-39 Marathon National Champion), but he has put that aside to be there for me and when I have success, it is us having success. I definitely could not do it without him. As far as a team, our little independent team is really made up of myself, Ron, my coach (Dr. Brandon Grove) and our good friend/web guy (Barry Wood). Each of these people have played a huge part in making this team work even when no one thought it was possible. They each believe in me, the team and what we are doing and that is huge. And of course, without any of my sponsors none of what we do would be at all possible and their support means a lot to us. It is important to be able to represent companies that you believe in and believe in you in return.

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