

# How I Roll... Endurance Phenom Pua Sawicki

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[Pua Sawicki](#), 28, came out of Mililani, Hawaii, and hit the endurance mountain bike scene pretty hard in 2004, and from seemingly out of nowhere is now at the forefront among racers. She's since bagged NORBA Marathon and 24 Hour Solo National Championships and wins at legendary events like the Baja Ultra Endurance 100K; Dirt, Sweat & Gears; Now she's gunning for a spot on the U.S. Olympic team.

After our [group video interview](#) at the National Mountain Bike Oktoberfest didn't turn out too well (*no audio came through!*), I decided to check in and learn a little more about how she rolls...

**BIKERUMOR:** You left Hawaii for California in order to race mountain bikes...did you have a job or team gig lined up when you moved, or did you just figure it out when you landed? How old were you at the time?

**PUA:** When I left Hawaii in August of 2002, I was 22-years-old and had just graduated from College. I had no plans, no job and no thought of racing bikes at that point. All I knew is that I had island fever and it was time to see what else was out there. After being in California for 2 months, I went on my first mountain bike ride in a year and met Ron (now my husband). Eventually he helped to intensify my itch of racing again and in 2004 I took my first pedal stroke in the Nationals and now I am here.



**BIKERUMOR:** Your given first name is Monique...where'd the nickname Pua come from?

**PUA:** From the time I was a little girl, it has always been a little confusing when it came to my name. I was born Monique Puanani Mata, but my family always called me Niki. When I entered Kindergarten, I used Niki because my parents thought it would be easier and then from 1st grade on, I was Monique. So, growing up, I had people calling me Niki and Monique, and many people thought these were two different people.

It wasn't until I moved out to California and met Ron, that Pua (my middle name) really came in to play. We thought it would be nice to keep me linked to Hawaii and have a name that was easy to remember, so we decided to start using Pua (it means flower in Hawaiian).

Also, to give back to my family who has been my biggest support and keep my name with me, we called our team "Mata." This is my maiden name and it also means to kill or conquer.

**BIKERUMOR:** How many bikes do you own and what's your current favorite bike?

**PUA:** I am not completely sure, but I think it is around 8 bikes. Because we were living on the road, we put a bunch of things in different places and I know we have bikes in a few of those places.

Currently, my favorite bike would have to be my Ellsworth Truth (*shown below*). At the moment it is down to 21 pounds and the ride is insane. The Truth is definitely the most pedaling efficient bike and my set-up this year is my dream set-up, I could not be more excited.



**BIKERUMOR: What upcoming bike technology are you most excited about?**

**PUA:** Well, Ellsworth is working on some new things that I am really excited about. I would love to tell you a little more, but I might have to kill you! Just kidding! But, I really can't say more.

**BIKERUMOR: What's your favorite time of day to ride and why?**

**PUA:** I love to ride when the sun is up and the heat is on, I love the hot. I get cold pretty quick and I rather not have to bundle and pack up for a ride. That is the reason that we choose Southern California as our base during the winter.

**BIKERUMOR: Where is your favorite place to ride and why?**

**PUA:** This is always a hard question to answer because I really have more than one favorite place. During the summertime I would have to say that one of my favorite places would be Park City, Utah. There are hundreds of miles of trails that are right above Park City and make it super easy and fun to put together an epic ride and not be in the middle of nowhere. One of my favorite trails there would be John's Trail.

During the winter time I would have to say that Hawaii and California are my favorite places to ride. When I go back home to Hawaii for Christmas and New Year's I spend a lot of time on a trail called Peacock Flats. It has an awesome climb that rewards you with insane singletrack. You can't beat having the backdrop of the blue ocean and green valleys as your pushing the pedals.

Then when we are back in Southern California, my favorite place to ride is the Cleveland National Forest. It is full of mega climbs and epic singletrack for miles and miles.



**BIKERUMOR: Who's your greatest competitor? In other words, what one person do you like to see on the starting line that makes you think "OK, this is going to be a good race"?**

**PUA:** In the US, rather than naming a certain individual, when I see certain teams show up, I know it is going to be a good race. A couple of those teams would have to be the Luna Chix and Subaru Gary Fisher.

**BIKERUMOR: The first time I met you was at the National MTB Oktoberfest, an 8-Hour race. Since 2004, there's only been one year ('06) where you didn't take home some sort of national endurance title, whether in Marathon, 24 hour solo or NUE. Are you focused exclusively on endurance events?**

**PUA:** In the past, my focus has been exclusively on endurance events, but I am starting to switch my focus on cross-country. I love to race every distance and I will never lose the love of endurance racing or put it completely on the side, but this year cross-country will have the priority.

**BIKERUMOR: On average, how many miles do you ride each week? What's the mix of road versus mountain miles?**

**PUA:** My training is based on hours instead of miles and my average would be anywhere between 18-22 hours in the saddle each week. During the winter, I spend about 40% of my time on the mountain and during the racing season, I spend about 80% on the mountain.

**BIKERUMOR: What's your most grueling workout...the one you hate but force yourself to do?**

**PUA:** That would have to be those lactate threshold interval days, I would rather do 6-8 hours of massive climbs any day.

**BIKERUMOR: Have you done or are you planning any stage races? If so, which ones?**

**PUA:** I have done a few stage races and most recently was the American Mountain Classic last year. It was an amazing event with an incredible and challenging route. I would love to make it back there this year, but it will depend on my schedule. I absolutely love multi-day endurance stage races.



**BIKERUMOR:** What do you consider your single greatest cycling-related achievement thus far?

**PUA:** I would have to say my three 24 Solo National Championship titles. 24 solo is such a grueling race that puts you through a test that no other race can compare. There is something about pushing yourself even when you feel like you can't turn the pedals one more time.

**BIKERUMOR:** What do you consider your biggest cycling goal for the future?

**PUA:** Right now that would be the Olympics.

**BIKERUMOR:** For 2008, you rode on Ellsworth bikes. Any big changes to your ride or other sponsors?

**PUA:** For 2009, the biggest change to my ride is my suspension. I have been riding DT Swiss wheels since the beginning, but I will finally be fully DT Swiss, both wheels and suspension. Not only is this stuff trick, but it is all carbon.



**BIKERUMOR:** Word on the street is you launched your own brand of Chamois Cream. Can you tell us a little about it?

**PUA:** Yes, it is called Okole Stuff (which basically means Butt Stuff). It is a chamois ointment that focuses on ingredients that work and heal the skin while working. A few of the key ingredients are Lanolin, Allantoin, Aloe and Tea Tree Oil. I spend a lot of time on the saddle and with one application of Okole Stuff I don't have to worry about anything going on down there.

If people want to try it, right now it is available on our website at [Okolestuff.com](http://Okolestuff.com) and soon it will be available in bike shops around the country.

**BIKERUMOR: What was missing from the current Chamois Cream offerings that made you want to create your own?**

**PUA:** After doing my first 24 solo and feeling the effects of it in places other than my legs, I began trying every chamois cream out there and I would come out with the same result, they did not work. The trend seems to be the focus on “natural” ingredients, and I guess that is great, but I am not eating it and I want something that works. Majority of the products out there are water based and within minutes of application, I feel they disappear. This is why Okole Stuff is petroleum and lanolin based. I can apply once at the start of a 24 and reapply maybe once and the only effects I feel after I get off the saddle are my legs. Try it, it works.



**BIKERUMOR: You also started Team Keiki to give youths some sense of team belonging and encourage their development in the sport. Tell me more about that. How does a kid join Team Keiki? Are there age limits?**

**PUA:** Yes, it has been so awesome and the kids are amazing! [Team Mata Keiki](#) (Keiki means kid in Hawaiian) is a small team that is made up of kids from around the country. As we travel around racing, we get the opportunity to not only see the most amazing places, but we get to meet the most amazing people, including kids.

Cycling is an incredible sport and we love to share that with people and it is a great way to give kids something to look forward to, something to be proud of and be a positive influence to their friends. With Team Mata Keiki, it gives them the opportunity to do that while being a part of a team.

At this point, there is no official application, but the kids on the team are kind of handpicked. We just kind of know when we meet them and feel their love of cycling, it just kind of clicks.

**BIKERUMOR: Last question: You’ve competed in a few triathlons and X-Terra events over the years, and I read in an older interview with Outside Magazine that you wanted to one day complete an Ironman triathlon...anything planned?**

**PUA:** Triathlon was the beginning of my cycling and since that beginning, my dream was to compete at the Ironman World Championships on the Big Island. I actually qualified twice, but had to turn it down because my running scholarship in college had priority. Right now I have huge mountain bike goals and that is my only focus, but let’s just say, one day I am going to go back and get that dream.

**BIKERUMOR: Thank you for telling us how you roll, Pua! Best of luck this season!**

You can check out our video interview with Pua showing off her race bike [here](#).

**PHOTO CREDITS: Some photos by dancampbellphotography.com, provided by Team Mata and/or from Pua’s website.**