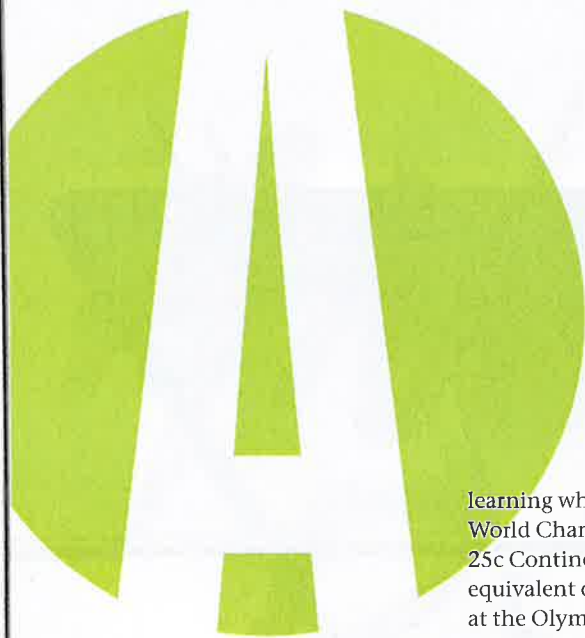


ANDY POTTS 2.0

AFTER TWO FOURTH-PLACE KONA FINISHES, TRIATHLON'S LONE WOLF DITCHES SOME QUESTIONABLE STRATEGIES FOR A MORE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO LONG-DISTANCE GLORY.

BY CHRIS FOSTER PHOTOGRAPHS BY JESPER GRONNEMARK





AT 39 YEARS OLD,

Andy Potts has seemingly done it all. He was a six-time All-American swimmer at the University of Michigan, represented the U.S. in triathlon at the 2004 Olympics, and nabbed the 70.3 world champ title in 2007. But even after more than a decade racing triathlon, Potts still trains on his own terms, working out alone and taking chances with untested gear strategies. The approach has worked well so far, but there's one thing it hasn't helped him get: a spot on the Kona podium. With back-to-back fourth-place finishes in 2014 and 2015, Potts is re-inventing himself to become a Kona contender in 2016—by finally reaching out for help.

"I've made a ton of mistakes and ended up

learning what *not* to do," Potts says. At the 2015 Ironman World Championship, for example, he decided to run 25c Continental Gatorskin tires with butyl tubes—the equivalent of showing up to the 5,000-meter track event at the Olympics with steel-toed work boots. He was trying to avoid a time-sucking flat, but his flat-proof setup may have cost him more than seven minutes, based on our own rolling-resistance calculations, dropping Potts to fourth place again; 2015 Ironman world champ Jan Frodeno beat Potts by six minutes. "I made a mistake," Potts says of his tire choice. "I never said I was the smartest guy in the world, but that was unnecessarily dumb, especially with neutral wheel support."

Potts also faced intense online scrutiny on Slowtwitch.com's message boards back in 2012 for using two different-sized cranksets—a 170mm pair on his training bike and a 175mm pair on his race bike. Theories abounded as to why he did it. Some thought it was to increase turnover while training and then generate more power on race day; others cited "hip angles" and "saddle differences." The guesses were fun, but the truth was far less exciting. "There was no thinking behind that," says Potts, who laughs about others' attempts to rationalize the setup, which ultimately caused him outer knee pain. "I didn't do it on purpose. It's just what I was given!"

Other things Potts does haven't hurt him, necessarily. But they've added to his aura of quirkiness, a guy seemingly impervious to the influences of the triathlon world around him. Take his training preferences, for example. While many Ironman pros will pepper bike workouts with long rides outdoors, Potts is committed to his trainer. "If I'm training, I ride six days a week, and those are six indoor bike rides," Potts says. "It's probably because I swam for so long that I'm comfortable with being alone with my thoughts." His home gym in suburban Colorado Springs is set up like an apartment, with a mini fridge to



OUT WITH THE OLD ...

A FEW LESSONS ANDY POTTS LEARNED THE HARD WAY

Self-flagellation

"Five years ago, I was watching a swimming race on TV. It was a sprinter [César Cielo, 50-meter world record holder from Brazil], and he was banging on his chest, slapping himself in the face. He gets into the race and just dominates. I thought maybe there's something to that, so I tried it before Timberman in 2009. I'm banging on my thighs, my chest, my back. I'm slapping everything as hard as I can. I swim OK, but then I get on the bike, and [because of the beating] my thighs are literally like, 'nope.' The only reason I was moving forward was because there was a tailwind."

Smooth pits for perfect pics

"One time I was at a race in Japan [a 2006 ITU race in Ishigaki] and I thought, 'I'm gonna shave my armpits.' I thought I'd have the opportunity to grab the banner because I was in really good shape, and there was a really good chance I'd win. If I did, I wanted all of the pictures to look clean and good. But I bombed! I had a terrible race! And I was like, 'That's it, I'm not shaving again!' Since then I hadn't shaved until like three years ago." In total, Potts guesses he's shaved for seven triathlons, including his big win at Ironman Canada in July. He'll be shaving for Kona this year.

"FOR THE PAST 13 YEARS, IT HAD BEEN ME SAYING, 'WHAT'S AERO? I DON'T KNOW, LET'S TRY THIS AND SEE IF IT WORKS,' BUT I HAD NO IDEA IF IT WORKED OR NOT. ... AT THE BEGINNING OF MY CAREER, SOMETIMES I JUST WASN'T READY TO LISTEN [TO ADVICE], OR SOMETIMES I WAS TOO STUBBORN."



keep his bottles cool, a pedestal to read on and a TV to watch the Tour. It's less like a man cave and more like a pain office. The only thing missing is a fan; Potts layers the torture on thick and never uses air conditioning or a fan, unless he feels dangerously hot.

To stay lean during his race season, Potts turns to spice. "Spicy food will limit the amount of food I can eat because it's so hot, so I end up eating less of it," Potts says. During his heaviest training cycles, Potts' go-to foods include Mexican, sushi with extra wasabi or Thai, which he usually eats once per week in order to curb his appetite.

Finally, his approach to race travel is legendary. Most long-course pros often arrive at the race site a week or more before an event. Potts, however, has a habit of flying in just a day or two before racing—even for Kona. Then he'll leave right after crossing the finish line, provided he doesn't have any sponsor obligations; he likes to be at home with his wife and two kids and to sleep in his own bed. And he'd rather sacrifice weather and altitude acclimation than arrive early to a race; he likes to use the anticipation surrounding race weekend to amp himself up. "Mentally, when I fly in, there's a certain vibe," Potts says of the nervous energy around a big event. "I try to take advantage of the 'up'—the excitement that's there."

But this year, with that Kona podium in his sights, Potts has been changing his entire approach to racing—at least on the gear side—with help from his new bike sponsor, Cannondale. "I'm more open" to others' advice now, Potts says of his new mindset going in to this year's Ironman World Championship.

Cannondale's team of engineers is working with Potts to keep him from reliving "Tire-gate" of 2015. They're

spending time with him in the wind tunnel to help him choose equipment and set up his rig, from his aero helmet to his hand and water bottle placement. He'll be racing on Enve wheels, Potts says, because they tested well in the wind tunnel with his new frame. "For the past 13 years, it had been me saying, 'What's aero? I don't know, let's try this and see if it works,'" Potts says. "But I had no idea if it worked or not." It's not that Potts was ever given bad information about his setup—he just didn't know how to ask for feedback. "At the beginning of my career, sometimes I just wasn't ready to listen, or sometimes I was too stubborn."

Former lone wolf Potts also began reaching out to fellow pros to help up his gear game. Well-known tri supergeek T.J. Tollakson, for example, recommended Continental 23c GP4000 clinchers with latex tubes—according to data, Potts says, clinchers roll faster than anything else when used with the right tube.

"I thought, 'If I'm not athletic enough to overcome a few obstacles, then I don't deserve to be on the podium,'" Potts says of his early years in the sport, and recognizes that today things are different. "In karate they say, 'When the student is ready, the master will appear.'" ▲