

## Favorites, part 5: Miss MTBO and Mr. Ski-O

*Short stories about this year's camp favorites will be published the next couple weeks.*

European champions Emily Benham (Great Britain) and Hans Jørgen Kvåle (Norway) are amongst the favorites to win MTBO camp 2014 at Bornholm.

### **Besides MTBO?**

Emily: I draw Foot-orienteeing maps in Norway (both forest and sprint) as well as MTBO maps. I also spend some time as a bike mechanic in G-Sport Brandbu when there is extra work available. Other than that, my days are spent as a professional athlete: training, eating and sleeping.

I am building a race 29'er this year and aiming to get it below 8kg (without rigid forks). It's something of a challenge and passion, and I am able to put the components I want on the bike. It's becoming an obsession: I saved 0.2% of the approximate total weight just by changing some screws which cost €1.5 per gram. I felt it was a bargain but HJ commented I should get a life!

HJ: HJ is even more a professional athlete than Emily in that he doesn't work apart from drawing MTBO maps occasionally. He does what he needs to do to be the best in the World at Ski-O! Apart from sport, he works occasionally in the sport shop, and spends most of his free time working as the Chair of the Athletes Commission in Ski-O.

### **Job**

Emily: I trained as a Physiotherapist and was then accepted into the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in 2012, but gave both up to move to Norway to live with HJ and become a professional athlete.

HJ: Recently earned his Master of Sport Science degree but has been a full-time athlete for many years. His current 'job' is working as the chair of the ski-o athletes commission and working for the IOF on Ski-O academies to get more people involved.

### **Home**

Emily: I grew up in Salisbury Wiltshire (nr Stonehenge) and studied in Sheffield. I had an amazing playground on my doorstep in Sheffield for mountain biking, but now in Norway the terrain for mountain biking is even better.

HJ: Hans Jørgen grew up in Brandbu, Norway and spent most of his childhood playing sports. He regularly takes Emily out on technical MTB rides and tells of he when he was young he used to ride technical sections faster and faster, which has allowed him to become a good MTB'er now. He moved to Lillehammer when he was 15 and then at 18 to Mora Skigymnasium. He then continued his studies in Falun before coming back to Norway with Emily last year.

### **MTBO involvement**

Emily: I started foot-orienteeing when I was 10 and reached a reasonable standard as a junior, representing England and Great Britain at various competitions. I became mentally overtrained in the winter of 2006-2007 and started MTBO on a whim. I found that I enjoyed it even from my first race on a battered second hand Giant. My 3rd competition saw me take silver at EJOC in 2007, so from the beginning I knew I preferred biking over running. I have never regretted the decision to focus on MTBO and I know I have reached a better level already in MTBO than I could have in Foot-O. I had some good years in 2008 and 2009 and then lost my way when I entered the elite class. I had to meet Hans Jørgen and move to Norway to discover what I had to do to win medals. But now I've found what works for me, I just have to keep doing it! Furthermore I now really enjoy mountain biking and constantly talk about bikes, building bikes, weight, wheel size, new technologies and kit! I'm sure HJ doesn't listen most of the time!!

HJ: HJ started MTBO in 2009 in order to improve his ski-o. It turned out he had natural talent and speed on a bike and took a bronze in the JWOC middle in Denmark. The Norwegian Orienteering Federation have an unusual approach to MTBO, in that HJ can only attend MTBO events for training purposes to improve his ski-o. In order to Norway to send a team to major MTBO events each athlete has to be a member of the Ski-O team. Until this changes then Norway will only send a small team. Ironically Hans Jørgen has very good chances to take his first individual WOC medal in MTBO, but he claims he will stop before the finish line to stop this happening!!

HJ, how do you rank SkiO and MTBO in importance for you. Are you focusing equally on each discipline or is SkiO your major discipline and MTBO just one way of keeping in shape both physically and orienteering technically throughout the no-snow-season?

All of Hans Jørgen's training targets ski-orienteering and him becoming World Champion in 2015 in Norway. Ski-O is different to MTBO in that all distances require the same techniques so Hans Jørgen focusses on all distances. In MTBO however he tends to focus more on the sprint and middle races as these suit his navigational style better. He still turns up to MTBO races well prepared, thanks to the work Emily does, and spring/summer training consists of bike work too. The summer season is Hans Jørgen's base period with high volume, so just imagine his results if he trained as an MTBO athlete and tapered for races!

Both of you represent nations which traditionally have very few skilled riders. You stand out as the lone top MTBO athlete in your nation, but do you think it is likely that we see any new up-and-coming talents from GB and Norway within this or next year?

Norway have a few ski-o athletes who have expressed an interest in MTBO, but sadly those outside the ski-o team stand little chance of getting to represent Norway in MTBO, regardless of their skill or motivation. We are working to change this, but it's a process with many brick walls. In the coming years we could see some more athletes in MTBO but how successful they will be remains to be seen.

In the UK, we have big issues with permission and access to forests so the number of MTBO events are dropping. In addition, most MTBO events are in Autumn/winter which means there can be few races in the summer. We have a talented junior who is at the top of his game in cyclocross and XC racing, but the lack of MTBO events in the UK mean he doesn't always have good access to terrain or maps that are good for MTBO.

Motivation for success in MTBO is probably the biggest factor in getting good results when from small nations. There are always possibilities to train for MTBO, it's just a matter of asking the right people and finding the right information.

Em, you have the chance to equal Michi with most number of camp victories (3) this year. Does winning MTBO camp mean much to you, or will you just use the camp to do a week of hard MTBO training?

I was really lucky to take the win last year as Marika Hara mispunched (?) in one race. In 2010 I was really going for it in the final race to beat Michi, and I'm super excited to be heading back to the same terrain in the Swedish World Cup. For 2013 I was fatigued before the training camp, hence why I was lucky to win! This year I'm not aiming to win, but would like to have consistent performances. The camp provides a great opportunity to get out training with maps directly in the terrain, and to iron out the creases my technique has picked up over the winter! There are always issues I find early season where my technique is rusty, the training camp always allows me the chance to make all my stupid mistakes at once so I don't do the same things later when it really counts. Of course, it's always great to win and a cumulative win over 5 races is good too!

Em, how is that SkiO season working out for you?

Ummm ... I am not good at ski-o! I am afraid to crash because it takes so long to get up, and the tracks are not wide enough to accommodate a snowplough wide enough to bring me to a stop! This year I have tried to avoid races with hills and I have enjoyed the majority of the races I did!

I discovered fat bike orienteering this winter, so I've been having some fun there! The bike came with tyres that have little grip on, so I could only ever fat bike in hard snow conditions, and even then with many crashes. When I bought some super grippy tyres a whole new world of fat biking opened up, and now I can bike in all conditions apart from super soft powder snow. Running 2psi in a tyre is always fun!

Hans Jørgen and I are working at our clubs mountain cabin, Lushaugen at Lygna skisenter April 5-6. We will make some ski-o tracks and host the 'very unofficial world fat bike orienteering champs'! So if anyone wants to try or buy

a fat bike (or HJ's 29'er that weighs 8.5kg) then you are welcome to join us for the weekend and take a bike home with you! Free accommodation and no entry free.

/Johan