



## Del Lloyd (Team KEEN Torq'ers) on the Female's Role in Adventure Racing Teams 06/08/09

The first most important thing to learn is how to compete as an equal when it comes to manners. Ignore everything your parents tried to teach you. Making loud and unpleasant digestive noises and being able to critique what comes out of your nose are the keys to survival and a necessary self defence.



Seriously, there is definitely nothing special about being the team female, you're a member of the team just like everyone else. Women can and do lead teams. Women are biologically suited to endurance sports. The contributions women make are important, and there is a reason why mixed pairs/teams perform well on the results pages.

Each person in a team has strengths and weaknesses and contributes in a different way, and that is as true for men as women.

Given the opportunity to share a few key tips my advice for women new to AR would be as follows:

**Confidence & experience.** In a mixed team it helps to be sure of yourself. Some of the best early learning experiences for me were in women's teams. Race in different locations, different lengths and types of races, and with many different people to get a rich variety of experiences under your belt. In the longer term choose teams and team mates who bring out the best in you, and most importantly, team mates you respect and vice versa.

**Learn to navigate.** Women can use a compass just as well as guys. Even gifted navigators need time out occasionally, and all team members should be able to step up to the plate when it's needed. Many top teams have girls at the helm some if not all of the time.

**Establish your role.** Find your way to contribute to the team in a meaningful way. Being a sheep is no fun. I am chief timer, measurer and nutrition nazi on our team. I set a watch and shout "time to eat & drink" every 15-20 mins. That allows me the pleasure of telling everyone what to do at least 3 times an hour(!) and despite being a tad annoying at times, it is a genuine contributing factor to our consistent performance as a team. You may not carry as much gear as the guys, but contribute in other valuable ways.

**Don't expect to get looked after.** If you do, you'll probably be disappointed! Obviously, in a long race looking out for each other is crucial; but everyone is ultimately responsible for themselves. If you need a hand ask for it, if someone else needs a hand, then offer it. If not, get on with doing a good job in yourself.

**Don't get left behind.** Get up the front as much as possible, that way if you need a hand there will be others around. Suffering out the back is lonely and miserable. No one should get left behind; it is simply not an efficient way to move as a team. Of course in a longer race women's sticking power should shine through on about day 3, and you might have to remind yourself not to leave the guys behind!

**Look after your feet.** You'll go faster if you're not hobbling. Copy someone else or buy the book "[Fixing your feet](#)" (Vonhof, J, Wilderness Press 2006). Start with some preventative measures (tape areas prone to blistering and apply a thick layer of [Sportslick](#) or [Blistershield](#) depending on wet/dry conditions) then don't be afraid to stop on route to re-apply before it gets

too bad, especially if it is a long race. You may be the one to call a stop, but there's every chance the team overall will thank you.

**Take your nutrition seriously.** Give your body the best chance of performing at its best. We use the aforementioned timer as well as good planning (grams of carb per hour) and lots of discipline (every 15 mins take a sip or a bite no excuses). In most races there's no time to recover if you empty the tank.

**Be honest.** Egos only get in the way, and being stoic usually leads to more troubles and a slower pace later in the race. If you are getting sleepy, brewing an injury, or have some energy to spare, then be upfront with yourself and the others. Expect everyone in the team to be honest; girl or guy. If your team thinks they are too good to communicate honestly, find a new team. They'll probably go faster.

**Equalise energies.** Everyone will have ups and downs. If you are on the 'red line' and everyone else isn't then get a tow or off-load some of your weight to someone else: you can always take it back later. If you have a strong team carry the smallest possible pack and no more than essential whistle and water. In longer races (more than 2 days) I find that the discrepancy in speed between men/woman is much less and would tend to carry a bigger pack, particularly later in the race.

**Practice towing.** If you are going to do it, really efficient safe towing takes practice. Get the setup right (particularly the length and strength of the line if you are using bungee cord on the bike) Practice hooking on and off smoothly; and who to work with. No one should be too proud; it's a matter of evening out energy to get to the next CP as quickly as possible. Everyone on our team carries a tow line, and everyone has been on both ends of it.

**Have fun.** Adventure racing is a tough sport but should be an enjoyable journey. Find a team who you can laugh with, fart with, and where you can give as good as you get. Things will go wrong, and in general the sooner you see the funny side of it the better! If you can't laugh out loud when you fall off your MTB and roll down a very steep hill towards a rocky cliff and 6 foot breaking waves then it's time to go home. (okay, no one was actually laughing at that point, when we quite nearly didn't come back from Africa alive, but we certainly made up for it soon afterwards!).

Adventure racing is a great sport for women. There is so much more to a good team finish than simply having 4 fast people within 100m of each other. I have heard of women getting a hard time, and had a few 'less good' experiences myself. You've got to live and learn but the most crucial thing is to choose a team who respect each other, where every member gives 100% and knows that that is good enough. Women often bring different but valuable things to a team and provide a balance which benefits the team's performance overall. If all else fails - don't be afraid to tell them to get stuffed!

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