

LOUISE RITTER



Victor Sailer

It's easy to believe from her two American Records and bronze medal in the World Championships that Louise Ritter had a great season in 1983. After all, her final AR (6-7) put her \approx 3rd on the all-time world list, and the medal was the first garnered in that event by a U.S. woman since 1956.

But 1983 was more than great. The average of her top 10 meets was just over 6-6, the second-highest season average ever (Tamara Bykova's 1983 average is first at a shade over 6-6 $\frac{1}{4}$). Of the 35 clearances by U.S. women over 6-4 $\frac{1}{2}$, Ritter now claims 25, twenty-four of which came in 1983 alone (her PR before last season was 6-4 $\frac{1}{2}$ from 1980). And it was nice to come back so well after an Achilles surgery canceled almost all of her 1982 season.

She has now been world ranked 5 times in 6 healthy years since 1978, but she—like many high jumpers—has seen her share of injuries and resultant surgeries: bone spurs in left ankle (early '77), bone spurs again in left ankle and arthroscopy on right knee ('79) and the torn left Achilles in '82.

Her 1984 indoor campaign was shut down after she incurred a bruised left heel warming up at Millrose. Even with the bruised heel, she competed at Millrose and Albuquerque, and then finished

second to basketballer Nancy Lieberman in ABC's Superstars competition in early February.

A 1982 graduate of Texas Woman's University (physical education/speech & drama), she began her career as a straddler with Doug Cockerham of the Red Oak Track Club and still claims the straddle "AR" of 5-11 $\frac{1}{2}$. She switched to the flop in March of 1977, and has been trained ever since then by Bert Lyle. She is advised and her schedule managed by Tom Jennings of the Pacific Coast Club.

Always friendly, she was more than happy to talk with us despite nursing a flu, and amid coughs and sniffles she shared her thoughts with us two days after her 26th birthday from her Denton, Texas, home:

T&FN: What was it that enabled you to have such a great season in 1983?

Ritter: With my past injuries, I'd never before had a season where I was totally well. In 1983 I did. I got off a real good jump early, so my confidence built real quick. The high jump is so much mental; I just got into a real good frame of mind. That's what I attribute it to, because

I really didn't change my workouts that much from the past.

T&FN: The U.S. is looking very strong in the high jump. What's behind that?

Ritter: It's finally a matter of, after all these years, athletes aren't quitting after their college eligibility ends. And the high jump is just a technique sport that you really don't learn the correct technique and get good until you're about 25-26 years old. Now I think we're able to concentrate about competing against the rest of the world, where before we were turning out new athletes every 4 years and people weren't staying around long enough to get good at it.

T&FN: A lot of people just get frustrated when they can't recover from injuries quickly.

Ritter: Well, the high jump is such an unnatural sport. What you're trying to do with your body and your ankles is just not natural. And injuries are a common result. If you ever watch a takeoff in slow motion, you'll see the ankle completely roll over. It

amazes me that some people stay in the sport so long.

T&FN: *As the rest of the world improves, do you see a similar improvement for U.S. women?*

Ritter: Oh sure. Bykova has proven that great heights can be mastered. When one woman does it, it shows the rest that it's possible. I saw her clear 6-8, and I don't think 6-8 is out of the question for us—there's a possibility that we might even see somebody do it this year.

T&FN: *Do you have the same expectations that Bykova has—a 6-10 jump?*

Ritter: I don't know, but when I jumped 6-7 there was a lot of daylight. And when I jumped 6-6½ I had a couple of inches to spare. I think it's possible that I can jump 6-10, maybe 6-11. But all the factors are going to have to be right. And there's a lot wrong in my technique that should aid me when it's corrected.

T&FN: *What are your general impressions of Bykova and Meyfarth?*

Ritter: I think Bykova is a great, great athlete. She's fast, she's explosive, she's got everything going for her. But I think that if she can't have her little tape marks on the ground where all her steps are, she might have problems.

And Meyfarth... I really don't know how much higher she can jump. She's jumping very high for the size woman she is [6-2/154]. She doesn't look as explosive to me as Bykova does. She does look awfully quick. They're both going to be tough to beat.

T&FN: *Have you ever thought about quitting?*

Ritter: Well, there's been a couple of times. Like after I had my second surgery I said if I have one more I'm gonna quit. And then after I had my last one I made a promise, "If I get hurt one more time that's gonna be it." But then, I get hurt and I say, well, one more time.

T&FN: *What was it that made you try track?*

Ritter: Well, when I was about 10 I had rheumatic fever, and I was bedridden for many years, until I was 13 or 14. When I got over it, I just thought I'd go out for track. I was looking for anything. I just wanted to be active.

T&FN: *How serious was the illness?*

Ritter: Not as serious as some cases. With some people, it affects their heart. I had a heart murmur for a while, but it didn't really endanger my heart. I could go to school, but after that I had to stay in bed—no activity at all.

T&FN: *Is there anything you do to keep a positive outlook?*

Ritter: I've never had a period of time, except in 1981 right after collegiate nationals, where I've been really down. Back then, I got real down on myself and I

didn't think I was any good. But soon I got my confidence back. I don't know why, but I just feel like when I'm out there I'm gonna do better than anybody else.

T&FN: *Is overconfidence ever a problem for you?*

Ritter: Not really, because I always know there's somebody that's just a little bit better, and I know that with the event being the type of event it is, that anybody can beat you any day. But you have to feel like you can win and that nobody else can beat you.

T&FN: *Is your performance in the 1976 Trials still one of your biggest disappointments?*

Ritter: It's close. One week before the Trials I cleared 5-11¼, and at the time only 4 Americans had ever jumped higher. I didn't have a good meet—I only cleared the opening height—and it was disappointing not because I didn't make the team but because I had a real poor performance.

I was real disappointed with my performance in Helsinki. I only jumped 1.95 [6-4¾] and that ended up as being one of my lowest jumps of my season. But that was basically because I didn't listen enough to my instinct. I'd been jumping well all year and I knew what I had to do, but I wouldn't change because I was so afraid I was going to do something wrong.

I didn't trust myself enough to change my steps. I knew that I should have moved back and I knew I was running too fast—probably because I was so excited. I was getting tons of height but I was coming down on the bar. If I had changed my step, you know, I might not have placed any higher, but I would have jumped far better than a 6-4¾.

T&FN: *Unlike a track athlete, you have to give 100% efforts many times in one meet. Do you ever feel that you have to give your all more than track-event athletes do?*

Ritter: Well, physically we might not have to give more than a track athlete, but mentally we have to do much more. Every single height—each attempt—is like a different competition. And sometimes that'll last 2-3 hours. It gets to me a lot faster mentally than physically. I mean, sometimes you have to give every single bit of energy and concentration you have for one attempt—and then you miss. It's real hard to come back for that next attempt.

And you know, it's like the pole vault: regardless of how good you do—unless you quit after you've won—you're always leaving on a losing note. So you always have to come back mentally prepared the next time.

T&FN: *Do you think you could have stuck around as long if you'd stayed with the straddle?*

Ritter: I don't think I could have jumped as high, because it's so hard. The

timing is so precise—if it's off at all you're gonna miss. But in the flop, if you're a little bit off you can still clear the bar.

T&FN: *Why did you change? Did Bert Lyle suggest it?*

Ritter: No, it's funny. He's real big on the straddle. But one day at practice I started flopping—just playing around—and I cleared 5-10, and that was higher than I'd jumped that year with the straddle. It was after my first surgery, and it still hurt a little to straddle but not to flop.

I still straddle every once in a while. Last summer in Rieti, me and Dwight Stones and Debbie Brill and Jimmy Howard were having all kinds of contests: who could straddle the highest, who could flop the highest off the wrong foot. I think I straddled 5-7.

T&FN: *As many Pacific Coast Club athletes seem to be, you're serious enough about the sport to stay in it as long as you can and yet easygoing enough so that it's not an all-consuming task. How does that work?*

Ritter: I think it's because we know it's a job, we know it's what we're doing because we want to do it. At the same time, I think we all understand that if we take this situation too seriously—the way you have to travel and the way you have to live in close quarters with each other—and if you can't get along with other people, then it's not gonna be fun. And if it's not fun, you're not going to want to do it anymore.

T&FN: *How did you join the PCC?*

Ritter: I thought they were too wild for me, but obviously I've fit in just fine. Tom Jennings didn't actually contact me—Dan Ripley sort of recruited me. We kind of have a situation where each person recruits somebody, and Dan recruited me.

T&FN: *Who'd you recruit?*

Ritter: I recruited Jimmy Howard. I think I did pretty good. □

Dorothy Louise Ritter was born February 18, 1958, in Dallas and is 5-10/130. Graduated from Red Oak (Texas) High School in 1976, where she was 3-time state prep champ, and from Texas Woman's University in 1982, where she was 3-time AIAW champ. Currently equal third on the all-time World list with her AR 6-7. Has raised AR 7 times: 6-3 ('78); 6-3½, 6-4 ('79); 6-4½, 6-4¾ ('80); 6-6¾, 6-7 ('83). Placings in major international competitions: 4th World Cup 1977; 5th World Cup 1979; 1st Pan Am 1979; 3rd World Champs 1983. Her progression (with World and U.S. Rankings in parentheses), including placings in major domestic competitions:

Year	Age	Affil	Class	HJ	Major Meets
1973	15	Tx	HS	Fr 5-8½	1)State
1974	16	"	"	So 5-10	1)TAC Jr 1)State
1975	17	"	"	Jr 5-11	11)TAC 1)State
1976	18	"	"	Sr 5-11¼ (x, 6)	6)OT 8)TAC
1977	19	TWU	Fr	6-1½ (x, 2)	2)TAC 1)AIAW
1978	20	"	"	So 6-3 (10, 1)	1)TAC 1)AIAW
1979	21	"	"	Jr 6-4 (7, 1)	2)TAC 1)AIAW
1980	22	PCC	"	6-4½ (5, 1)	1)OT 2)TAC
1981	23	TWU	Sr	6-4¾ (7, 2)	2)TAC 2)AIAW
1982	24	PCC	"	6-4 (x, 2)	
1983	25	"	"	6-7 (3, 1)	1)TAC
1984	26	"	"	6-5i	