



Aaron Olson competes in the San Francisco Gran Prix last month.

Riding High

Local cyclist enters the top tier of his sport.

It's safe to say that Aaron Olson has a more exciting career than most of his 1996 South Eugene High School graduating class. Olson, now a 27-year-old professional cyclist on track to fame and fortune, has already lived in Europe on two separate occasions, traveled Asia with a cycling team and has pretty much worked his own hours since he was 18.

"Some guys go to college and get girlfriends, get married and have kids," he says. "And other people decide that there are things that they want to do more."

For Olson, that thing was riding his bike. Specifically, it was riding his bike faster and more often than almost anyone in the world.

"I was just kind of driven as a kid to do something that I felt was productive and cycling gave me something to do to stay out of trouble," he says. "I trained hard and started getting good at it. Anything you get good at you just want to do more."

With his extremely demanding training came success. And with that success came even more vigorous training.

"He really has a tremendous work ethic," says his father, Ron. "It's nothing for him to go out and ride four, five hours a day with no one pushing him at all."

"I remember one time we were out riding and it was a cold winter day," says his high school friend Ashley Smith. "We probably did 50 or 60 miles in the rain. I'm getting ready to peel off and go home and he's getting ready to go out and do another 20 mile loop. That was just the typical Olson."

His continual rise through the cycling ranks led to his most recent contract signing — two years with Spain's Saunier Duval-Prodir, one of the top 10 racing teams in the world. In December he'll move to Spain and begin training with his new 25-person team, nine of whom will compete in the 2006 Tour de France.

"It's the highest level of cycling you can do in the world," he says. "I have all the best equipment in the world. For that reason I just have to do my job, represent my sponsors and see how far I can go from there."

Olson's first taste of Europe came when he was just 17 after qualifying for the U.S. Junior National Team. He loved the idea of seeing the world through cycling and quickly came to embrace the European lifestyle.

"I knew a lot of kids on the team who hated Europe because they didn't have conveniences like washers and dryers, but that didn't bother me because I think about it a little more," he says. "I like it over there."

"I think it really helped him," said his mother, Sharon, regarding his first trip to Europe. "I don't know if it was a worldview but I could tell a big difference when he left home with the national guys."

Two years later he qualified for the U.S. National Team and traveled to Okinawa, Japan. There he met his current girlfriend, Kim Anderson, who was a member of the U.S. Women's National Team at the time.

"He's probably one of the nicest cyclists and nicest people out there," says Anderson. "Every teammate he's ever had has nothing but great things to say about him. Just on and off the bike he's just really a genuine person."

It's not just his girlfriend who will attest to Olson's character either. Smith says he's one of the nicest people you'll ever meet. His dad says that fairness has always been one of his most virtuous traits. His mom just shrugs off similar compliments, saying "you always hope that your kids are really polite."

The last two years have been particularly successful for Olson. He signed a pro contract with Colavita/Bolla in 2004 and his continually strong finishes carried over to 2005. He's still getting better and he believes that his maturity has caught up with his talent and that he's ready to take the next step.

"I'm really happy," he says. "I wanted to go (to Europe) and felt like I was ready two years ago but now I'm really ready physically and mentally. The level is so hard over there — the speed and training. I'm looking forward to that and I want to make the most of it." **EW**

time bluegrass music of the Dickel Brothers. A shuttle bus will leave from 4th and Willamette at 6 pm.

All proceeds from the event go directly to the ancient forest protection work of the Cascadia Wildlands Project. Cost is \$10-\$50 sliding scale in advance, \$15-\$50 at the door,

children 12 and under free. Food and drinks are included in the ticket price.

Tickets are available at Tsunami Books, Cottage Grove's Bookmine and Kalapuya Books, and online at www.cascwild.org. For more information, call 434-1463 or e-mail info@cascwild.org

Happening people BY PAUL NEEVEL

JONI DAWNING

"I've seen around 400 kids born in the Eugene area," says midwife Joni Dawning, who announced a sabbatical at her 50th birthday party in September. "I'm taking time to go outside pager range." Dawning gave birth to her own first child, Megan, in Pittsburg, Kan., in 1975. "It was a perfect hospital birth," she recalls. "I wound up feeling spiritually adrift." She began to study birthing practices, and soon was called to help with a home birth when the midwife was delayed. Later, she worked with pregnant women at a shelter as a VISTA volunteer, then had two more children, Quail and Breeze, at home, as a hippie homesteader in southern Oregon. "Their birth focused my interest on the couple's experience of giving birth together," says Dawning, who moved to Eugene in 1985 to study midwifery, but didn't pursue certification. "I prefer to think of myself as a lay midwife." She counts five ongoing play groups among her clients and stays in contact with several hundred people. "They call me for advice about canning or chickens," she says. "I help people create community." In the photo, Dawning poses with her fourth child, 8-year-old Amelina.



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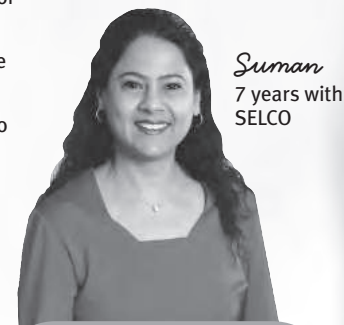
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