




Molly Cameron is all smiles after her podium at Cross Crusade's Hillbilly race (Josh Cohen).

# Molly

Oregon's favorite vegan, transgendered, bikeshop-owning pro racer.

WORDS BY Josh Cohen  
PHOTOS BY Josh Cohen, Joe Sales,  
Andrew Yee

# Cameron



Portland, Oregon's Molly Cameron is a very busy woman. She spends each weekend toeing the line against America's best elite cyclocross racers, occasionally hops over the pond to race in Europe, runs both a bicycle shop and a bicycle studio, writes a blog and still finds time to stay actively involved in her beloved local cycling community.

Molly stands out amongst her racing peers in a lot of ways. She's one of the fastest racers in Oregon 'cross, despite her full-time job. She spent this season vying for top honors in the River City Cross Crusade and lining up big UCI races around the U.S., but the ability to tear it up on the 'cross course hasn't gone to her head. She's incredibly nice, encouraging and welcoming—in short, she embodies the friendly, open attitude that draws so many people to cyclocross in the first place.

If the seemingly mismatched pictures, name and pronouns have you confused, it's because Molly is transgendered. She was born physically male, but she self-identifies as a woman. It's a trait that makes her unique in the predominantly-straight world of men's professional cycling. Molly is not the only gender queer cyclist, of course—she says she's met other racers and industry members—but as gregarious and outgoing as she is, Molly is arguably the most prominent transgendered racer. It has, at times, been a source of drama and difficulty.

#### World Traveler

Molly was born in Texas on August 28, 1976. Her father was a military medical technician, and her mother ran a daycare. A self-described "military brat," Molly moved all over the U.S. and the world as a child and young adult. After nine years in Texas, Molly and her family moved to Charleroi in Belgium's southern Walloon region for two years. You might assume living in the motherland of cyclocross would have been the jump-start to Molly's love of the sport, but the southern region is less obsessed with 'cross than the Flanders region to the north.

"Cycling's not as crazy in the Walloon region," Molly said. "Everyone rode bikes, but there were only a few big races in southern Belgium."

The world tour continued with a two-year stint in Turkey before the onset of the first Gulf War, several years in Delaware where she finished high school, a few years in Santa Cruz and five years in San Francisco before landing in her current home, Portland, Ore., in 2000.

#### Gender Identity

Living in San Francisco was a seminal experience for Molly's cycling and her gender identity. It was there that she began working as a bike messenger and track racing at the Hellyer velodrome in San Jose. It was also in San Francisco that Molly cemented her identity and came out as transgendered.

"When I was really first thinking about gender, I felt like it was really important to me to come out and tell everyone," Molly said. "I told my parents and the people that I lived with, but the people that I was closest to couldn't handle it and were freaked out. My parents were freaked out."

As it turned out, people less close to her were more accepting of her evolving identity, a fact that Molly struggled with. "It was kind of backwards to me. It was really, really hard to come out and talk about all of it."

Though she says it didn't play a conscious role in her move to Portland, reestablishing herself in a new city made her identity shift easier to accomplish.

"In hindsight, [the move] probably made it a lot easier. In San Francisco, lots of people knew me before I changed my name, so I'd have to

"A lot of the guys I met were, like, \* \* \* ?  
*what the f*"

be, like, 'Hey, I've got this whole new identity now!'"

As a new Portland resident, Molly began to get more serious about racing and experienced some negative reactions. She entered some women's Cat 3 road races and had some mixed results. She won a stage of a local road race—a performance that might have threatened her female competitors—and found herself on the receiving end of bigotry and disapproval.

"Some ladies were really supportive, but some threw a shit fit," Molly explained. "I had some ladies come up to me and say super-bigoted stuff about how I don't belong."

Oregon Bicycle Racing Association officials looked into the pertinent rules and the precedents set by USA Cycling and the International Olympic Committee to determine whether or not Molly would be allowed to race in women's categories.

OBRA officials decided that Molly would need a certificate from a doctor proving she'd had gender reassignment surgery, something that doesn't take into account many facets of gender queer identities.

Molly struggled with their ruling. "Without getting into my gender politics too much, I don't think gender is necessarily defined by your genitalia or getting gender reassignment surgery,

and that's not saying that people who need to do that or want to do that shouldn't do it, but I think you should be able to identify as a man or a woman or whatever you want."

In the end, Molly decided to avoid the drama and race with the men. As she improved and moved up to racing with the pros and traveling to big races around the country, a whole new group of riders were introduced to Molly and her gender identity.

"A lot of the guys I met were, like, 'what the f\*\*\*' at first, but when they got to know me, they were, like, 'ok this isn't something weird.'"

Molly has found that her gender has largely been a non-issue as a pro. She's even found



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some satisfaction knowing that she's introducing a lot of people to queer gender identity for the first time.

"What's been cool is that it's new to a lot of people, and I think at least it's opened some guys' eyes to anything transgender or gender queer," said Molly. "I've never had some other pro come up to me and say, 'hey you've opened my eyes to this gender stuff,' but you can tell the way people are way more comfortable around you, that they get it in their own way."

Ultimately, Molly is pretty low-key about her gender, making an effort not to "throw it down people's throats." She is, after all, going to races to ride hard and win, something she's found great success with over the last several years.

#### Real Job Blues

Molly's got six wins, five podium spots and a bunch of top-10 and top-15 finishes peppering her resume for the 2009 season. Focused on taking the overall Elite Men's title in Oregon's Cross Crusade, she spent the season locked in a heated battle with Erik Tonkin protégé Scott Babcock, of Team S&M. The title came down to the final Cross Crusade race at Barton Park. Molly led Babcock by one point heading into the race but came in third after a botched restart on the final lap. Babcock took the series overall. It was a disappointing loss for Molly, but

the Cross Crusade races are indicative of her prowess against Oregon's fastest men.

On the national scene, Molly is competitive, but often less of a contender for podium spots when racing in the big UCI events that draw riders like Jonathan Page, Jeremy Powers and Ryan Trebon. Molly attributes some of her struggles at big races to the fact that she doesn't have a professional contract. Whereas riders like Page and Trebon are paid solely to train and race, Molly earns her money running two shops in Portland. She is the owner of Veloshop, a traditional bike retail shop, and Portland Bicycle Studio, a one-on-one studio for higher-end clientele. These endeavors demand her time during the week and often pull her away from training.

"I don't want to whine that 'oh, I have a real job,' but it's definitely keeping me from the top," said Molly. "These are weeks when work gets rough, and I don't have a chance to even touch the bike."

Molly says that, if nothing else, the weekly work schedule affects her weekend consistency.

"I just have such big ups and downs," said Molly of her results. "There will be days when I can't even finish a race. I show up and I ride, and a lap in, there's nothing in the tank. And then there are days when I'm just ripping legs off. It's hard to anticipate that stuff."

Though she doesn't have a contract paying her to train and ride, Molly hasn't been racing as an unattached rider and certainly isn't lacking in the gear department. She spent several years riding for Portland-based bike builder, Sacha White's Vanilla Workshop team. In an amicable agreement with White, Molly moved on from the team this summer. She cited a lack of financial support and an increasingly overlapping customer base between Vanilla and the Portland Bicycle Studio as the main reasons she left.

"I was really torn, but at the end of the day I was, like, 'well I'm basically sponsoring myself at the Studio, and I really need to start taking care of my own new business.'"

This past summer, Molly started a small Portland Bicycle Studio team consisting of a few elite Portland road and cross racers. Riding at her own title sponsor, she collected cutting-edge race bikes and gear from companies she made contact with.

"When I started selling Ridley bicycles, they asked if I wanted to ride their cross bikes. It was a hard decision because there are so many local builders, so many good guys you can ride for in Portland."

Molly's worked with Shimano for several years, getting hooked up with shows and support. This year, they supplied Molly with a full D12 drive

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train for her Ridley "A" bike, Dara-Ace tubulars and XT8 pedals. With all of that top-level gear hanging on the full carbon X-Five frameset Ridley supplied her, Molly is riding some decidedly professional steeds.

For the gearheads out there curious about D&Z's ability to withstand the filthy rigors of cyclocross, Molly says have no fear. "It's no joke. It just shifts perfectly every time," she testifies.

Granted, flipping the equipment is part of the deal for Molly. But, after a full season of Cross Crusade's weekly dishing of rain, mud, grime and quite possibly splashes of beer, she says the D&Z has remained "so solid, I can't praise it enough."

Beyond the pro gear and the high-caliber racing, and definitely beyond the gender identity, Molly Cameron is a deeply ingrained member of the Portland cyclocross community. During the course of our interview at the Hillsboro Cross Crusade race, we were interrupted no less than five times by racers eager to talk to Molly, and it was clear that Molly was genuinely interested, happy and excited to talk right back.

A beginning racer stopped by the tent to share a report of his morning race. A customer came to chat about the fit of his new equipment and garner some last minute advice. A father and son swung in and asked a question about the D&Z-equipped bike. She engaged with each person, shooting the breeze and answering questions, a smile plastered on her face the whole time. That experience, perhaps more than anything she said during the interview, illustrated Molly's deep love for cyclocross and its community.

It makes sense that a sport that relishes the use of unicycles, tandems and costumes would not only tolerate or accept a transgendered woman, but also welcome her with open arms. Molly's racing, life and attitude parallel many of the things that draw amateur racers and fans back to cross week after week. She trains and races hard. Really hard. She pours her energy and emotion into the effort every time she races. She spends her weeks working a real job to make ends meet and support the racing addiction. Most importantly, she goes to races as a fan and a community member, reveling in the friendships that form and strengthen each and every race day. ☺



From top: Molly raced Cross Vegas for the third straight year (Joe Sales); Molly shows off her D&Z-equipped Ridley at Star Crusade (Andrew Yee).