

Adelaide Tillinghast, Class of 2011

By Karen Beman

Where does the story of a nationally ranked women's cyclist begin? With Adelaide Tillinghast it began as a way to get involved and focus on a stretch goal during her freshman year at American University in Washington, D.C. "I loved running in high school, but I knew that running wasn't a sport I could continue competitively in college," admits Adelaide. "What running did give me was a drive for success, strong lungs, and leadership skills. The first month I arrived at American University I discovered the cycling team and bought my first road bike. Cycling gave me focus during my first year of school and something tangible that I could work towards: becoming a better racer and competitor."

At the collegiate level, the sport of competitive cycling is an exceptionally demanding venture. As an American University athlete, the cycling season begins in early February and ends in late April. On average, the cycling team travels five hours to and from the host university each race weekend. In addition to her university cycling commitments, Adelaide also competes in a field with the top women cyclists in the Mid-Atlantic area.

Working hard eventually paid off. "I started as a Women's Collegiate B rider and this past spring moved up to the top level, Women's A," says Adelaide. She currently competes as a Women's A rider in the Atlantic Collegiate Cycling Conference (ACCC) which is one of eleven conferences within the USA Cycling organization. The top athletes from each division are selected to represent their conference at the National Championship.

In two short years, Adelaide has developed into a highly competitive and successful cyclist who won the silver medal in the individual time trial at the USA National Collegiate Cycling Championship in Ogden, Utah in May. She is the first



cyclist that American University has ever sent to Nationals. "I will never forget the moment I crossed the finish line, feeling like I was going to collapse, when I heard my name loud and clear from the official's deck that I had secured second place in the individual time trial. I couldn't believe that I had pulled it off because I doubted my ability to compete in a national event, but I surprised myself. This triumph is a reminder of my hard work on the bike, but also a constant reminder of the training I must continue in order to improve. Like they say, "it never gets easier, you just pedal faster."

Adelaide is the first to admit that her journey hasn't just been about competing. "What a journey it has been so far, it's hard for me to imagine that only two years ago I had never been on a road bike," she recalls. "Behind the scenes I have met some of my closest friends from AU and riders from other universities. My teammates have helped me become a better racer and consistently push me to improve."

Adelaide's strength as a leader continues to propel her into positions of leadership. She was recently elected as President for the American University Cycling team. When asked if she had any advice for young athletes, she was quick to respond. "Don't be hesitant to try something new, I

would have never discovered the sport of cycling if I hadn't gone out of my comfort zone and purchased my first road bike. Second, if you want something badly enough, a lot of hard work can put you on track for achieving your goals. But, always train with other people because you push yourself much harder than if you train alone. So if your goal is to run a faster 5K, find someone who is a little bit faster than you to train with."

What comes next for our silver medalist? "My next goal is to put in long road miles during the off-season in order to ride strong and comfortably during the collegiate season. The next big race on my radar is Collegiate Road Nationals 2014 in Richmond, VA next May. I have my eye on the gold in the Individual Time Trial."

To find out more about collegiate cycling and follow Adelaide's future cycling events, link to www.usacycling.org.