

## Never mind the sun setting

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### SOFT-SPOKEN, BUT ALSO CALLED 'THE DOMINATOR'

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#### How the grammar is marked in this key:

Subjects are blue, and their verbs are bold black.

If the subject is separated from its verb by a relative adjective clause, then the S and V are green.

Before the sun begins to rise off the coast of the Big Island in Hawaii today, Harriet Anderson will jump into the Pacific Ocean. She will swim 2.4 miles. Then she will ride a bike for 112 miles. Then she will run the marathon distance of 26.2 miles.

If everything goes well, Anderson, of San Carlos, will do all this in about 15 hours.

But here's the really amazing number: She turns 69 next week.

"It's just great fun," said Anderson, the oldest female finisher last year at the Ironman Triathlon World Championship, one of the world's toughest and most famous endurance events.

Yes, she said fun.

Anderson is a soft-spoken woman who modestly describes herself as "more of a sinker than a swimmer." She does not consider herself an exceptional cyclist or runner, either. Perhaps the most impressive thing about Anderson is that she seems so completely unimpressed with herself.

"I'm not able to go very fast, but I can just keep going," she said.

And going and going.

"She looks like the most unassuming person in the world, and you would never know that she is a fierce competitor," said

Anderson's daughter, Linda Burt. "One year at the race they called her 'the dominator of her age group.' So we started calling her The Dominator because it's so not her."

A retired school nurse, Anderson not only has finished all 12 of her previous Hawaii Ironman events, she also has always finished among the top five in her age group. A living-room shelf is chock-full of Ironman trophies from years in which she won her division, including 2003.

Bob Babbitt, publisher of Competitor magazine and a six-time Ironman finisher, said Anderson is doing more than just racing against other triathletes, or even herself.

"Harriet is competing against perceptions that somebody her age should not be out there, but rather knitting, sitting in a rocking chair and playing mah-jongg," Babbitt said. "She's

**saying, 'Forget** that. **I'm pushing** myself to limits that **people** my age **aren't** supposed to reach.' "

Although **Anderson might be** an extreme example -- excelling at a race **that covers** 140.6 miles -- **she is** emblematic of how senior **athletes are attempting** more strenuous activities at older ages.

"**It may be** that **people** like her **are** very, very special," **said Dr. Jeffrey Metter**, a medical officer with the National Institute on Aging. "But **I'm** not convinced about that. **We're hearing** of more older people competing in events like marathons. **It shows** that older people **who train** properly **can do** these things."

The late-blooming **Anderson** never **considered** herself an athlete. **She played** tennis in high school and **was** a band majorette, but **it was** a college summer **job** working in Yosemite

that **provided** clues of her fitness.

"All the **guys would tell** me that **I was** a good hiker," **she said**. "**I guess I had** natural endurance."

**She would marry** Gary Anderson, now a retired engineer, and **have** two children. **Burt said** her **mom spent** her free time assisting the children's athletic careers -- **Linda was** a figure skater and her **brother**, Michael, **was** a tennis player and runner.

When **Gary** and **Harriet became** empty-nesters, **they joined** a fitness-for-life class. Through that **they met** some runners and began doing 10Ks. Then marathons. Before **Anderson knew** it, **she was trying** triathlons, winning her age group in her first event in 1987.

"**I got** a prize, and **that was** really exciting," **Anderson said**. "When **I was** young **I never did** anything where **I would get** a prize.

**It's** great fun getting stuff like a watch and a T-shirt. So **I'm** kind of a kid at heart."

**She competed** in her first Hawaii Ironman in 1989, and ever since **has been** a regular because each time **she wins** her division, **she earns** an automatic berth to the next year's Ironman. **It means** she **does** not **have** to qualify for the ultra-exclusive race that **Babbitt calls** the Super Bowl of triathlons.

**Anderson** always **finishes** the challenging course within the 17-hour time limit. Last year **she won** her division despite the fact her **training was interrupted** months earlier when **she was hit** by a car -- totaling her bike. Luckily, **she suffered** only soft tissue injuries. This year, Anderson's **preparation was delayed** by a month when **she was slowed** by pneumonia.

Yet, **she realizes she has been** fortunate. **Anderson has** never

**suffered** the sort of debilitating joint injuries **that have ended** the triathlon careers of many peers, including her husband.

"A lot of us **who started** in our 50s, 20 years ago, just **can't do** this anymore because **we've had** injuries," **said Gary Anderson, who** no longer **can run** because of a herniated disk. "But **she's** pretty amazing. **You would** never **know she's** about to turn 69."

**She trains** six days a week. **She has** never **had** a coach, preferring to follow instructions from a triathlon training book. **She** also **attends** Pilates and body-shaping classes. Her **diet is** long on fruits and vegetables, and short on sweets.

"**She gets up** at 5 in the morning and **goes** for really long runs," **said Burt, who** also **lives** in San Carlos. "**She'll say,** 'Oh, **it's** just so nice and peaceful, and **I can think** out there.' Then **I'll ask** her how far

**she ran** and **she'll say,** '15 miles.' Meanwhile, **I just got** out of bed."

**Anderson was named** the female Outstanding Age Group Athlete last year by the World Triathlon Corporation. **This is** like being called the Ironwoman among Ironwomen.

"In triathlons **they write** your age on the back of your calf so **you can keep** track of other people in your division," **Babbitt said.** "**Imagine** you're somebody in your 30s running along, and then **Harriet Anderson blows** by you wearing a 68 on her calf?"

But **Anderson,** wearing a sleek Nike sweatshirt, really **did look** like a kid in a candy store when **she was showing** off her high-tech bike recently. Anderson's **helmet** and **outfit will match** the yellow-and-black bike. **I even planned** to wear yellow nail polish today.

"When my **daughter was skating,** I'd **make** her dresses and bows and everything else for her matching outfits," **Anderson said.** "Now **she says,** 'Mom, **you're taking over** where **you left off** with me.' "

**Anderson wants** to do triathlons until **she is** 70, and then **she might retire.** **Burt said she'll believe** it when **she sees** it. Her **mother has been threatening** to stop for years.

**Burt added:** "Out of the blue the other day, my 4-year-old **son said,** 'Mommy, **I want** to be an Ironman just like Grandma.' "