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12 Months, 12 Top-Riders, 12 Interviews

by Mad4One

Interview with

*Alina & Leonie  
Czimek*

TWINS IN LIFE,  
OPPONENTS IN SPORT?  
TODAY WE MEET TWO  
EXTRAORDINARY  
ATHLETES, THE QUEENS  
OF THE TRACK RACE,  
ALINA AND LEONIE  
CZIMEK...

# TWINS IN LIFE, OPPONENTS IN SPORT? INTERVIEW WITH ALINA & LEONIE CZIMEK

THIS IS ONE OF A LONG SERIES OF "FRATERNAL CONFRONTATION" BETWEEN SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN SPORT.

IN OTHER DISCIPLINES, THERE ARE MANY ATHLETES BORN IN THE SAME FAMILY WHO EVEN COMPETE (DUE TO THE GOOD GENES, THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, THEIR TALENT AND/OR THE TYPE OF EDUCATION THEY RECEIVED SINCE THEIR CHILDHOOD ) TO BECOME THE BEST IN THE WORLD.

THERE ARE CHAMPIONS WHO HAVE PRACTICALLY ALWAYS PLAYED TOGETHER IN TEAMS, SUCH AS HIROMI AND TAKAMI OMINAMI IN THE MARATHON, THE ABBAGNALE BROTHERS IN ROWING AND BOB AND MIKE BRYAN IN TENNIS, BUT MANY TIMES THERE HAS BEEN A DIRECT CHALLENGE.

TODAY THE TWINS AND WORLD CHAMPIONS LEONIE UND ALINA CZIMEK TALK WITH US ABOUT THEIR OWN SPORT AND LIFE EXPERIENCE ....



## THEIR MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

Jahr	Wettkampf	Leonie	Alina
2008	Unicon XIV in Dänemark	erste Teilnahme an einer Unicon	erste Teilnahme an einer Unicon; 2.Platz: 50m Einbein
2010	NRW-Meisterschaft im Rennen		Erstes Mal Weltrekorde in 800m und 400m aufgestellt
2011	Deutsche Meisterschaft im Einrad Rennen	Weltrekord im Coasting aufgestellt	
2012	Unicon XVI in Italien	2.Platz: 10km, 4x100m Staffel 3.Platz: 800m	1.Platz: Coasting 2.Platz: 10km, 800m, 400m, 4x100m Staffel
2013	Eurocycle	1.Platz: 50m Einbein 2.Platz: 800m, 400m, 200m, 4x100m Staffel	1.Platz: 800m, 400m 2.Platz: 4x100m Staffel
2014	Unicon XVII in Kanada	2.Platz: 10km, 400m, Coasting 3.Platz: 800m	1.Platz: 10km, 800m (WR) 3.Platz: 400m, 100m, Coasting
2016	Unicon XVIII in Spanien	2. Platz: 10km, 800m 3.Platz: 400m, Marathon	1.Platz: 10km, 800m (WR) 2.Platz: 400m, Marathon, overall race Vize-Champion 3.Platz: 100m, Coasting; Cyclocross
	Einradcup Münsterland		aktueller Weltrekord in 800m: 2:01,92 min
2017	EC Unicycling	1.Platz: 400m 2.Platz: 800m 3.Platz: 10km, Marathon, 50m Einbein, 30m Radlauf	1.Platz: 800m, 30m Radlauf 2.Platz: 400m, 100m, 50m Einbein, 10km, Marathon 3. Platz: Cyclocross
2018	Unicon XIX	1.Platz: Coasting, 4x100m Staffel 2.Platz: 10km, 800m, 100km-Staffel 3.Platz: 400m, Marathon	1.Platz: 10km, 800m (inoffizieller WR), 4x100m Staffel 2.Platz: 400m, IUF-Slalom Coasting, 100km-Staffel, overall race Vize-Champion



WHEN AND HOW STARTED YOUR PASSION FOR TRACK RACE? WAS IT ALREADY A "FAMILY" PASSION?

At the beginning we practiced at the same time freestyle and track race, but soon we realized that we had more fun on track, so since 2009 we have totally focused on this discipline. What we love most in this specialty is its versatility. There are more aspects on which we can work on, for example sprint, technique and resistance. Furthermore, this is a very fair sport and is not based on subjective evaluations. At the end of the race, the one who has the best time wins. We also share the passion for track racing with our family, in particular with our father. He likes to come to our competitions. He supports us and takes care of our unicycles.

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH ONE OF YOU ON TRACK, TOLD BY YOUR SISTER ....

Mmmhh ... this is a difficult question. We never really thought about it. But, if we have to point out some characteristics....

Alina runs with only one hand on the saddle. While running she turns her head slightly to the left and has a relatively relaxed face expression compared to most competitors.

Leonie bends her upper body more downwards than I do during the race, and when she runs, she has a harder face expression... a third characteristic? I can't find it at the moment...

ALINA, HOW DO YOU MANAGE STRESS AND, IN YOUR OPINION, HOW CAN YOU WIN EVEN WHEN YOU HAVE STRONG PRESSURE ON YOU?

A good preparation for the competition is essential for me to cope with the pre-race stress. If I feel fit during training it means I'm ready for the race, too. On race day it is essential to do the right warm-up so that the muscles are warm and I feel relaxed. Then, when I'm in the pre-start, the concentration phase starts. I focus only on the starting signal, the start and the race.

I think that some pressure or tension is part of every competition, and has a positive effect on our body and increases our concentration.

LEONIE, YOU BOTH KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER THAN ANYONE, BOTH AS A PERSONS AND AS ATHLETES. DOES THE "BAD DAY" OF YOUR SISTER BECOME THE "BAD DAY" ALSO FOR YOU?

I cannot answer with a "yes" or a "no". If we look at it from the competition point of view the answer would be "no", because we are still competitors in the race, and a bad result of your competitor also means a better placement for you.

But my "real" answer would be "yes".

If one of us has a bad day - in competition or in everyday life - this effects the other, too, and your success inevitably becomes a "half happiness".

ALINA, LEONIE, WHO ARE YOUR MODELS IN SPEED-ON-TRACK AND IN LIFE, THAT YOU BOTH ARE AIMING TO?

Both in sports and in life, we think it's exemplary to set goals and to work hard in order to achieve them. People who have this approach to life - such as most of the top athletes do - are a great example for us.

We are often told that especially female athletes, do not remain at the top of rankings for a long time. It would be great if we could prove the opposite by climbing the podium still for many years.

YOU TRAIN A LOT TOGETHER, BUT WHAT DOES ALINA AND LEONIE LIKE TO DO OUTSIDE THE STADIUM?

Yes, it's true, we train a lot together. We live together and work in the same company where we spend most of our day. So, yes, we see each other very often. But we spend a lot of time also together even outside of work and race-training.



## ARE THERE OTHER PASSIONS BESIDES SPEED ON TRACK?

We love to do sport surrounded by nature, so, in addition to normal training, we go walking during the week with a couple of colleagues. We spend the weekend almost always with our family or friends, for example, around a nice barbecue



## LEONIE: HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO WELL BALANCE SCHOOL, WORK, FRIENDS AND FAMILY?

I think that if you want it, you can always find time for all this. Even if our working day is quite long we always find time to train, before or after work.

I don't even have the feeling of having to give up something to practice my sport daily.

## ALINA: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR 2016'S WORLD RECORD IN THE 800MT AND HOW DID IT HAPPEN AGAIN IN 2018 IN ANSAN?

In 2016 in Spain, I set the World Record in the age-group category. I decided to compete in the age-group category without too much stress. (Editor's note: these batteries select the best times for the Finals).

On the same day I had to attend all final races. I knew that in the evening I would have to give the best out of myself. So we started. Leo ran the first lap and I ran the second one. The race was easy for us, so we were very surprised when, after the finish line, we learned that I had set a new World Record. In the evening, during the final, it started to rain heavily, the track was completely wet. Under these conditions, it was not possible to set a better time.

Two years later in Korea, the times of the best riders in the 800 mts were definitely closer to mine, for sure the competition would have been harder. So I tried to gain immediately the first position and with all the energy I had in my body I launched myself towards the finish line. At the end of the race I hoped to have set a better time, and I was really happy when I realized I had set the new World Record (even if not official).

## LEONIE: HOW IMPORTANT IS TACTICS ON TRACK?

In my opinion, the tactic is not decisive in short speed races. As soon as you hear the starting sound, just try to accelerate as quickly as possible and keep the maximum speed until the end. But the longer the race, the more important the tactic becomes. On the one hand, you have to measure your strength, because whoever gives the maximum in the first few meters does not have enough power for the final sprint and collapses in advance. In the 800 meters and in the long distances, where there are no fixed lanes, you can also take advantage of the fact that you can save forces by slipstreaming.

YOU TRAIN TOGETHER, BUT THEN, WHEN YOU COMPETE ON TRACK, YOU ARE ALONE IN FRONT OF THE FINISH LINE. YOUR FIRST PLACE IS OFTEN "STOLEN" BY YOUR SISTER, HOW DO YOU REACT IN THESE MOMENTS?

In the race, of course, each one does his/her best and, as we have said, the one who runs fastest will win. However, because we always train together and know perfectly how much effort this requires and how hard it is, my sister's success is always my success, and, with great joy, we together await the victory.

Especially in the 800mt track or in the long distances, like the 10 km or the marathon, you can often run as if you were a "team". This not only helps you to save energy by slipstreaming, but you are also much more motivated and the track does not seem to be so long.

MANY TIMES, IN OUR INTERVIEWS, WE COMMENT QUOTES, WRITTEN BY WORLD CHAMPIONS WHO HAVE MADE THE HISTORY OF OTHER SPORTS. LEONIE, ALINA, DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN QUOTE?

It is very important for us to work hard for our goals and then give our best in the competition. If you act in this way, you should be satisfied with your result, even if it is not enough to win. We think, these quotes are in line with this approach to sports and life:

"Discipline is just the choice between what you want now, and what you want most."

"If you really give your best, you can't blame yourself."

"No one who gave his best regretted it later."

"The harder the victory, the greater the joy of winning".



LIFESTYLE, NUTRITION, ON THESE TWO TOPICS DO YOU HAVE USEFUL SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUNG ATHLETES?

We believe that athletes should set challenging, but achievable goals. Don't be depressed if you fail. We also advise to make always your best and to focus on training, but do not forget to listen to your body, too, and give it time to regenerate. As far as food is concerned, we recommend, of course, to eat in a healthy and balanced way, but also to enjoy occasionally small prizes, such as something sweet. 😊

A QUESTION FOR BOTH OF YOU: WHICH IS THE ASPECT THAT CONTINUES TO EXCITE YOU IN YOUR DISCIPLINE AND WHAT - IF YOU COULD DECIDE - SHOULD BE IMPROVED?

What we love most in this discipline is the great variety of races it offers you. This allows you to train on multiple fronts and better "manage" your mistakes, which can be recovered in other races. We like very much to follow unicycle races even as spectators - especially the 400 and 800 mt track race - we find them really exciting.

As regards our sports, it is really nice to meet every two years at the World Championship riders coming from all over the world. We met many of them at the last Unicon and we became friends. In our opinion it would be important at the Unicons as well as the European Championships to use at the start a sensor which will detect early departures. For sure, this would make the race more professional and, on the World Championships, it would grant great accuracy and would also allow world records to be set.

Furthermore, it would be nice if, when scheduling the championship races, it could be considered that many athletes who attend speed races usually compete also in the endurance. So the marathon should not be scheduled in the evening after a day of speed races.

ALINA: IN THE SPORTSMAN'S LIFE THERE ARE MOMENTS OF STRONG ENERGY, SUCCESS, GLORY, BUT ALSO MOMENTS OF DIFFICULTIES AND DISAPPOINTMENT. BEING SISTERS HELPS OR COMPLICATES THINGS?

If one of us makes a mistake, she is disappointed because of her failure. I believe this happens to all athletes. Of course, this failure cannot be modified by a good performance of your sister, but the happiness you feel for your sister's achievement, which is as important to you as yourself, helps to raise your morale.

CAN YOU TELL US AN ANECDOTE THAT MADE A RACE SIMPLY UNFORGETTABLE?

The event that still remains in our memories is the final of the 800 mt at Unicon 17 in Montréal. In 2012 in Bressanone, we were unable to take 1st place, but only the 2nd and 3rd. We therefore worked on the tactics to get a better result. We divided the race in two: the first lap would have been run by Leonie while Alina would have run the second one. However in Canada it went a bit differently. Here Leonie placed herself ahead just 100 mt after having rounded the corner. However, the Japanese Asahi Takada, World Champion at the previous Unicon, placed herself immediately behind Leonie, so that Alina was third. Just after 600mt Alina managed to pass Asahi and let Leonie know, that she was behind her. Then Leonie let Alina enter. Alina had enough strength - she had been able to take advantage of slipstreaming behind Asahi and then behind Leonie - to make the final sprint towards the finish line. This would have enabled Asahi to overcome Leonie, but not Alina. It was the first time for Alina to gain the title of World Champion in the 800 mt race, which was also valid as a World Record.

## LEONIE, ALINA: WHICH ARE YOUR NEXT APPOINTMENTS?

Alina's next appointment is on June 16th in Bottrop at the Bottrop's Glück-Auf-Wettkampf, organized by our Club. We hope that Leonie, who is recovering from an injury, will be fit again to participate. Then there will be the German Race Championship in Illertissen and we obviously scheduled to attend the European

Unicycling Championship in Sittard-Geleen



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THEN FOR SURE, WE WILL MEET AGAIN IN BOTTROP ON JUNE 16!

THANK YOU ALINA, THANK YOU LEONIE FOR YOUR TIME. WE BELIEVE THAT MANY COUPLES OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS - WHO SHARE THE SAME PASSION IN SPORTS - WILL AGREE WITH MOST OF WHAT YOU HAVE SAID. WE WISH YOU ALL THE BEST FOR THE FUTURE AND SAY YOU GOODBYE WITH YOUR QUOTE: THE HARDER THE VICTORY, THE GREATER THE JOY OF WINNING"

BYE, SEE YOU SOON :)

ALSO THE NEXT INTERVIEW IS FEMALE. THIS TIME THE APPOINTMENT IS WITH KATRINE JENSEN, TWICE WORLD CHAMPION IN INDIVIDUAL FREESTYLE AND X-STYLE.

WE MEET HER IN HER LABORATORY, BECAUSE KATRINE IS NOT ONLY A NUMBER 1 IN UNICYCLING, SHE IS ALSO GREAT AT HER JOB...