

Broken Collarbone? No Kit? No Problem for RAAM Racer Franz Preihs.

Franz Preihs is an individualist who races to an alternative drummer. He doesn't force his views on anyone, but he is happy to share his perspectives with those who inquire. I talked with Franz and his wife Michaela, and here is what they had to say.



Stone: Hello Franz, thank you for taking time out of your training to talk with me. It's odd for me as I followed in close proximity to you in RAAM 2008 and I have one strong memory of that experience and sadly it doesn't represent your finest moment. I remember driving by you as you lay on the highway after the crash you took and sustained a broken collar bone. In my own mind the scene plays over and over like a horror scene in a B rated flick. I see red for caution, for alarm for fear. I will never forget the heat and the isolation of the accident.

Being a journo at heart, I went out of my way to find and drink a beer in your honor when I learned that you climbed back in the saddle and carried on. I tipped my beer can to you then and I tip my hat to you now. Job well done Sir!

Now, 9 months later you prepare once again to climb into your rightful place, behind the bars of your Focus Speed Machines and again face the challenges of Solo RAAM. And like 2008, your wife and crew chief, Michaela will be managing your campaign. Welcome back and the best of luck to you and your crew.

The first question I have for you today is regarding your ultra endurance pursuits. Would you say that you are in control of them or are you doing the best you can to manage an addiction?

Franz Preihs: Well, I really enjoy working out and I have a well defined relationship with nature. Besides ultra-cycling, I have done a lot of mountaineering and Alpine skiing for many, many years. Maybe it is somehow like an addiction, but it is a positive one. I feel good when I am outside, exploring the landscapes and myself. When I am unable to train I feel like a caged animal. But like a caged animal who suddenly finds his freedom I feel I may be susceptible to exerting too much energy so I work very closely with a nutritionist, a MD and a sport scientist. We do a lot of research and testing all year long which helps me feel safe and I don't think that what I do is unhealthy.



Photo by Thomas Krajacic

Stone: Let's face it; you completed 50 or so marathons in 4 years before you were informed that running wasn't in your future. While many would have reacted to the news by carving out a more relaxed lifestyle, you switched gears and dug in deeper; do you really have control of your actions?

Franz Preihs: Since I was a boy I was into sports, I started competition in Alpine skiing when I was 5 years old. I cannot remember a life without training and racing. After my running injury, I never thought about quitting sports, it is the way I live my life, it is the struggle I need. I think I was reminded of this a few weeks before last year's. Michaela and I worked so much! We said to each other, let's do it, but never again. During RAAM, when I was riding in West Virginia, both of us knew that we would be back.

Stone: Could you tell me about your body art?

Franz Preihs: I started to get tattooed when I was about 17. I was always involved in the hardcore music scene and had a weekend job as stagehand in a local music club. I got in touch with the big bands of the business at the time like Biohazard and Madball and besides the music there were a lot of tattoos. I was

also into "straight edge" for a couple of years - that means I was living on a vegetarian diet, I was not drinking alcohol and I did not smoke. The tattoos are like good friends, always by my side wherever I go. They give me some sort of "security" feeling.

Some of the tattoos are just for fun, some have a deeper meaning. For example the RAAM Tattoo or a classical heart with the name of my wife have a deeper meaning. Right before RAAM 2008 I got a small butterfly-skull on my left arm. I was at the tattoo store with one of my 2008 crew members and childhood friend, Bernhard. He got the same tattoo on the same place on the same day. it was like an act of "blood brotherhood". During RAAM I often look at some of my tats. My mother always fears that I will not like the tattoos when I get older - but it's a part of me!

Stone: Last year, during the Race Across America, you crashed in a way that appeared as if you just weren't paying attention, what happened?

Franz Preihs: I can't remember much about the crash. I was very tired and racing on a long straight road, I was in my aerobars, maybe I dozed off and BANG, I hit a road sign. During the "flight" (urgent trip to hospital) I knew that my collarbone or shoulder was broken. At the hospital, they fixed the broken bones, put on a bandage, and we went outside and started riding. I was not thinking too much about "why me why that" or stuff like this! I was concerned about the time we lost and the money we spent at the hospital - but I was wanted to finish RAAM!

Stone: When you were laying there on the road, where were your heart and guts? Was there panic, dread, fear? What was your primary concern, your body? your race? or did you have a sense of letting people down? Were you afraid? How much concern did you have about the worry you were causing Michaela?

Franz Preihs: During RAAM, or generally during any competitions, I do not think about anyone besides me. When I was lying on the road, I asked my doctor if I could continue. He told me that I have to take some x-rays to make sure that was no internal bleeding, but if I just broke my shoulder, I can try to move on. So I tried to assess my body, and besides the pain in the shoulder I felt ok. I was focused all the time. I told my crew that we will finish RAAM, even if we need until Christmas. They thought I was nuts!

Stone: So then you did finish the race.

Franz Preihs: RAAM is a beautiful race held in a wonderful country. It is a heartwarming team experience, a thrilling competition and an unbelievable journey for the mind and the body. I live my life the way I like it, I ride on my own paths and I feel the support of my wife and my family. As long as the fire burns in my heart I will continue!

Stone: You seem to be having fun but how does it break down? Many endurance athletes use some of their training and competition as a sort of way to pay penance. How much is fun, how much is penance and how much is just "training"?

Preihs: I try to keep the things simple - like in real life! If I want money - I have to work! If I want to do RAAM - I have to train! Training is the key to open the big box of RAAM surprises! I do not enjoy the training every day. I am still a man, not a machine. When it is cold or raining it really can become a battle. A thought often occurs to me, it is a quote from an Austrian actor who said: "let's have a look, which is stronger - me or myself". But, basically I enjoy it most of the time!

Stone: Can you win RAAM?

Franz Preihs: I can and I will someday! I finished in 2008, I will try to get on the podium in 2009, and I will try to win RAAM in the future. But I think I will need 1 or 2 RAAM's for getting that much experience, there are so many world class athletes participating! My first goal is to stay safe and healthy!

Stone: If you win RAAM would that trigger a change? Would you need to find something “more”?

Franz Preihs: Well, RAAM is a one of a kind competition, there is nothing "more"... But like everything in life, I can work to improve and optimize things. I can probably get faster. (He says with a grin)

Stone: On paper what Michaela brings to you seems ideal. How much of an impact does she have on your training and motivation?

Franz Preihs: I met Michaela in the spring of 2002, in Italy, during a training camp on a Monday. We went back to Austria 4 days later on Friday and I moved into her house the same day. We knew that it was the real deal..... She is my backbone; - there would be no RAAM without here! She is both very tough and motivating. When I am grumpy and procrastinate about the rain or the effort involved she often tells me that I should do my work (cycling) and that I should do it good.



Stone: Knowing the human side of Franz, seeing him in his full range of life, his strengths and his vulnerabilities, looking forward to this year’s RAAM, what percentage of the time do you anticipate enjoying the race and what percentage of the time are you worrying about the race?

Michaela Preihs: RAAM is a challenge for both of us. while other couples our age enjoy all inclusive holidays in Jamaica, we spend a fortune on a cycling race. I work as a full time radiologist in the hospital of Graz, so all of my whole free time gets consumed while doing RAAM or preparing for RAAM. But I love to see Franz realizing his dreams and I am proud that I can be a part of this larger than life experience. In percentage I would say that 85% of the time I enjoy the race and the organization for RAAM, and the other 15% I miss some sort of normality and traditional holidays like others do.

Stone: Will you push him or will you help him to do his best.

Michaela Preihs : Both! Franz is a completely different person when he is competing. Over the years he has become more and more focused. In last year’s RAAM he was like a machine. Right after the

accident, Franz self adjusted his broken collarbone several times and I was afraid that he will get crazy on the bike. I try to help him in the bad times and to push him exactly the way he needs to be pushed to stay motivated, focused and aggressive.

Stone: Have you ever pushed him too hard?

Michaela Preihs: Sometimes he claims that I am too strict the way I act during crewing. When I say "Franz - you have to drink more" - he often gets grumpy because of the way my voice sounds in this second. He tells me that he feels like he has to do some ironing or stuff like that, when I put my "Franz, you have to...." voice on!



Stone: What was it like last year in RAAM to cross the line?

Franz Preihs: I was thankful - I looked at my crew - the tired faces - I looked at myself in a mirror - I set down on the Annapolis pier and watched the small waves! I felt empty but grateful and satisfied.

Stone: Is it all the battles you conquer along the way that give you back for all you do or is it capsulated in those moments of victory?

Franz Preihs: It is the way to the finish line that counts. The support from the crew, the people cheering at the time stations giving you some sort of respect, the people and friends at home who support you during the race by sending e mails or signing the [guestbook on my webpage](#).