
2019 Triple Crown Winner Louise Kuehster and Pandora

This edition of the Triple Crown corner features 2019 Triple Crown winner Louise Kuehster. Louise is a member the renowned Kuehster burro racing family. Her brother, Wyatt, is the youngest runner ever to win a pack burro race, her father, Steve, has been a top flight burro racer for many years and remains competitive well into his 60's, and her mother, Mary is a past president of the WPBA and is also an accomplished burro racer. My first recollection of Louise is of a young racer who was very determined. It did not long at all for her to become a serious competitor who ultimately became a World Champion and Triple Crown winner.



1. What got you started in burro racing?

My parents! They started racing when I was small, and my brother and I would hang out at the race course. My first race was the 2006 bare-ass race in Cripple Creek. I was 10, and my mom ran that race with me. I don't remember much from that race but she says "you were very cute and already running faster than me". After that I slowly started running in more and more races.

2. Can you share a bit about your background/career

Right now I'm in grad school for chemical engineering at the University of Texas. I'm honestly not sure where I'll end up after this!

3. How many years did you/have you raced?

17 years, since 2006. There probably have been a couple skipped years in there.

4. What was your training schedule like for you and your burro?

In 2019 when I won the Triple Crown, I did one main burro run per week throughout the summer to train. My mom built out our training plan to make sure we got plenty of hills, elevation, and distance. Some weeks there might have been an additional short/fun burro run but mostly I trained without a burro (either running or rowing) for the rest of the days to keep her from getting burnt out. I also had a pretty solid cardio base from rowing for OU during the school year. Since then, I've found that it's pretty tough to train effectively when you aren't in the same place as the burro and can't do many long burro runs to prepare.

5. What was the burro's name that you won the triple crown with and can you tell me a bit about them?

Her name is Pandora, and she's one of the best burros out there! My parents adopted her from Longhopes donkey shelter, after my mom saw her picture online and instantly recognized an intelligent glint in her eye. She is indeed quite smart, and competitive! If there's a group in front of us, she can and will catch them provided that I can keep up. She's quite sensitive though, and if you push her too hard she'll just stop. It's definitely a balance to make sure that you're not asking too much. She doesn't like loud sounds either, especially yelling. It's a bit of a secret super power because she hates it so much that she'll do almost anything to stay far ahead of another racer who's yelling a lot.

6. What was your most memorable race?

Winning the triple crown at Buena Vista in 2019 when Tracy and I came in first and second. It was of course awesome to beat all the boys and an epic race overall. We got stuck behind a few other teams around the singletrack part of the loop, so we had several minutes to make up on the railroad grade coming home. We'd been practicing "lets go home" which everyone in my family uses to tell their burros that now is the time to go. So once we hit the railroad grade, I said "lets go home" and she just took off. I don't really know what pace we were going but it was awesome to make that comeback and see the training pay off! We'd also been working really hard on running through the finish line (she doesn't love all the noise and people) and she executed that perfectly as well.

7. Do you have any other stories to share from your adventures in burro racing?

Tons! I'm not sure how many I should type out. One of my favorites is from Idaho Springs many years ago, when Wyatt was also racing. He was way ahead of me, and I was running with Nugget (my mom's burro). We came up to an unmarked fork in the trail, where it was very obvious that most of the folks ahead of us had gone one particular way. Nugget refused to go that way, so we went the other way. Of course Nugget was right, and we ended up passing a ton of people who were lost on the wrong side of the ravine. Always listen to Nugget.

8. Do you have any advice to share with newcomers to the sport?

This is a bit of safety advice- if you haven't run a race before (and even if you have), don't be afraid to sacrifice a little speed to take the start of the race and any major downhills in front of your burro. It's easy to underestimate how fast a burro can go under race start conditions, or when they fall behind their buddies on the uphill portion and want to catch up on the down. Usually, I start up by Pandora's head and give it a few steps before I settle in behind her. That way I can see what kind of pace the leaders are doing and mentally prepare for whatever craziness I think Pandora might pull to catch up. Plus by the time I get behind her and start sprinting the field is spread out a little and hopefully I'm less likely to get run over. Same thing on downhills-- she doesn't like to run behind me but if I'm worried about being able to keep up I make sure to get in front of her before the downhill starts, and then move back once we've settled down a little bit and I know she's not just going to take off.



Photographer: Brian Wanke