

MARLEN REUSSER

Alé BTC Ljubljana rider **Marlen Reusser** is one of the fastest rising stars in the Women's WorldTour. Despite only taking up cycling relatively recently, she has won the Swiss national TT championships four times, and progressed to the European title this year. She also won silver medals in the Worlds and Olympic time trials. The Swiss rider tells *Procycling* about her continuing upward trajectory

Interview Adam Becket

Image Sean Robinson/Vélofocus





Are you feeling good now?

I'm just so tired. I'm not ready to lie about this. It has been such a long season, I have been travelling and racing the whole time.

How do you feel about your year?

I am more than happy with it. At the start of the year I had some trouble with my back, so it was difficult then, but in spring I felt it was going really well. I have not been in cycling for long, and I am progressing a lot. I feel that my progression curve is still going upwards. It was difficult to go to the Olympics, but I got that silver medal, and from then on everything went better and better, but I was already feeling exhausted by August. The World Championship TT was my biggest goal because it was my 30th birthday and it was a course that really suited me. I put so much pressure on myself for this race, and I feel like my morale went a bit after that.

How do you deal with that, your legs on their way down before the biggest race of the season?

I was not the only one who was tired. All the riders have done most of the

same races as me; they must be tired as well. It's late in the season for everyone. Van Dijk had started training for it later. I think it's important as a professional rider to focus even if you don't think the best of yourself at that moment.

Were you disappointed with silver or did the elation override that?

When I look at the whole season I am more than happy. It feels crazy; it feels like a dream. I would not change one second, I am so happy. I'm also looking forwards to the future. I am still making progress, and I know I have good legs when I'm in a good place. So I am sure that more is coming.

Did you think you'd be winning races and challenging for titles when you started?

This might be super arrogant, but in a way, yes. I never thought about winning, but there was always a feeling that I could be very strong if I did this for some years. I had never really focused on training. I was already quite old when I came to the sport. I always knew I had a talent in me, and when I saw how steep my improvement curve was, I knew I could go far. I never knew how far it would go, though. I would not have said that I would win at some point, but I would not have excluded that. I would have said winning was possible.

▼ Reusser recovers after her silver medal-winning ride at the 2021 World Champs time trial



How did you come to cycling, at an older age?

I started with endurance sports, I was running first. I really loved it, I still don't know what it is about running, but I really like it. Then I had a problem with my ankles, so I had to search for other disciplines. I did swimming, and then cycling a bit. I was only ever cycling as a hobby, though, doing it at weekends during the summer. When people saw how I performed with no training they said I had to join a club, and slowly I did more and more, and then one thing came to another and in 2017 I got a licence for the first time. I went to the Swiss nationals and won, Swiss Cycling came and tested me and were so excited about my values. Everyone pushed me and I just never braked, that's how it felt.

And then you were with the UCI team, in Switzerland?

My time with the WCC team was interesting. In 2018 I had a very bad crash. I broke all my pelvic bones and part of my lower back and I was in hospital for quite a while. I knew I wanted to compete in the World Championships in that September, which is how I got motivation for that year; I was 17th there. The WCC were really interested in me. They knew that I had no other chance, and it was perfect for me.

What was it like being in the peloton, and in road racing, at the beginning?

I didn't like it. I was always very shocked and anxious in the peloton. It was very difficult. If nobody helps you, if you aren't trusted, then you cannot move through the peloton. You could be anyone, and I really struggled, it was hard. I didn't like it, but somehow I didn't dislike cycling enough to stop, so I went on. Thomas Campana also saw that I had talent, and he was really keen on helping me go further, so I changed to his team [Équipe Paule Ka/Bigla-Katusha].



What was 2020 like?

As I didn't like road racing, I was quite happy. It meant I could focus on time trialling, because we still didn't know whether the Olympics were going to happen, and the World Championships were supposed to be in Switzerland as well. I did a really good big block of TT training, looking towards Aigle where the Worlds course was going to be. I knew I was strong, and I had a really good spring. Then when I found out that Tokyo was cancelled, it was even better because I knew I would have one more year, and I was getting better. I know it was a problem for lots of people, but 2020 for me personally was a good year.

How has your team been this year? It's the third year in a row that you are at a new team...

You are not the first person to ask this. It was clear that I would move

▲ Reusser rode to a silver medal at the Tokyo Olympic time trial this summer

on from WCC, so I moved to Bigla, and then the team folded last year, so what could I do? It was late in the year, so there were not great opportunities. I had some good results, but you would still have to invest in me. Alé BTC Ljubljana already had me on their radar, and so I had trust in them. They made me a very good offer, and I thought it was the right thing for that moment, so I signed for a year. It was a good thing to do. For the first time, I started to enjoy road races, which was basically my main goal. If I failed at that I thought then maybe I should stop - why should I keep doing something that I didn't enjoy? I learned quite a lot else too.

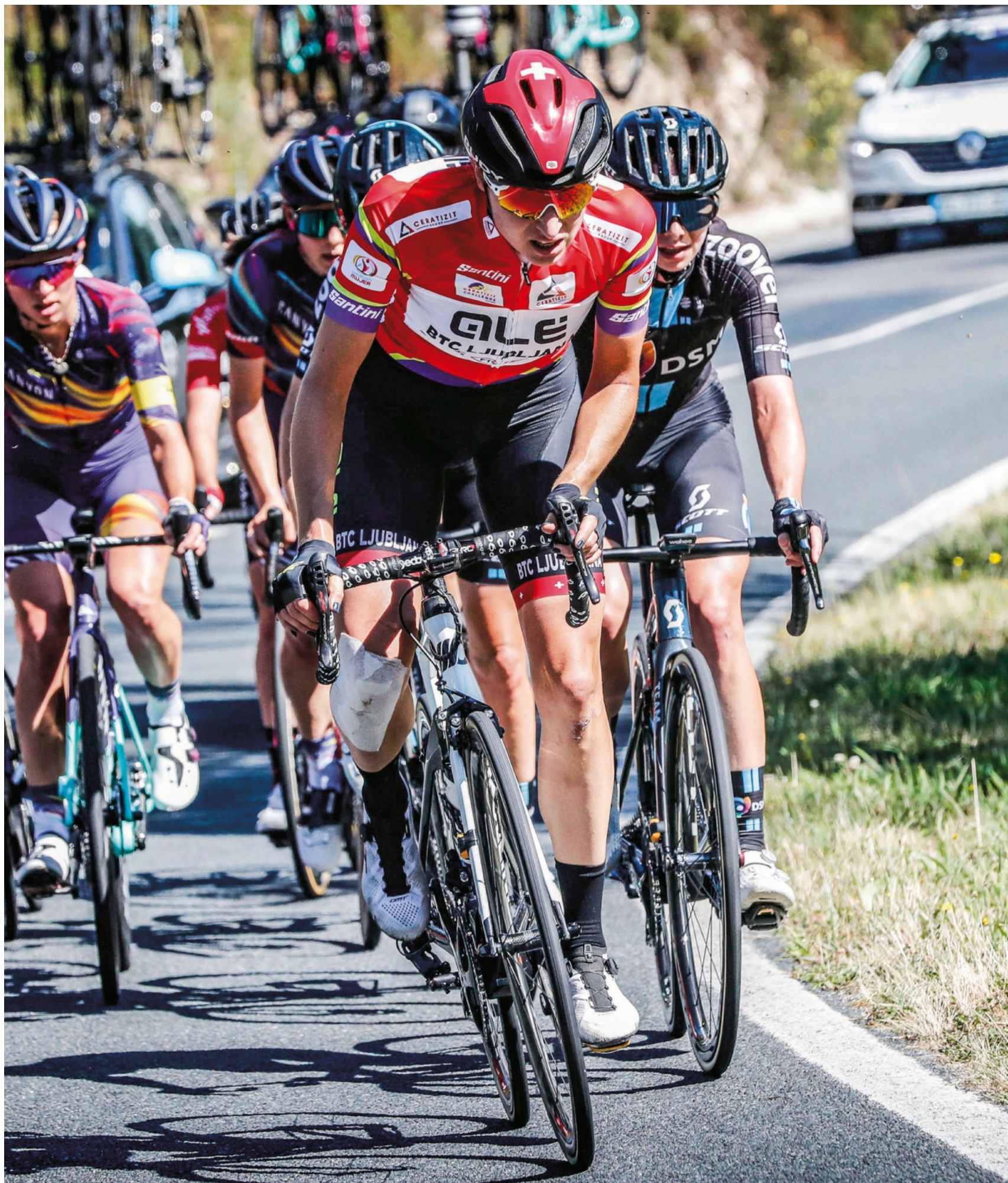
I progressed so much, and I need a team that is really professional and have a standard of riders who know how to win, so that's why I am moving further.

Do you have apprehension for SD-Worx next year? It is a big team and you will be a big rider among other big riders now.

That's what I wanted. If you have a team where you are one big leader and everyone else is a domestique, that's not good. Even if I was that leader, I don't think I'd like it. You can play a game with a race, you can execute a plan if you have the power to do it, and at SD Worx we will have the power to do that. At some races, I'm sure it will be me who can do that, but also I'm looking forward to win with the team and win with other riders. We will have different cards to play.

You said you think your road racing has come on this year. How does that feel?

Very, very good. The period between the Olympics and the World Championships I was just





▲ Reusser was triumphant in stage 1 of the 2021 Ceratizit Challenge

flying. I had to ask myself where this was coming from. You have so much fun on the bike, because you feel you can do everything. I really hope that I can get back to this form or even a better place for next year, because that was fun.

What do you enjoy about cycling?

There are a lot of things. Basically, I like this life of excitement. You have something coming up all the time, you meet interesting people, you have nice opportunities. It is a very interesting life, it combines with doing endurance sport, which is a real passion of mine. I try to understand myself. I think sometimes you feel more important in life. You think you matter, that people are interested in you. Everything about it is good. I like meeting other riders. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes there's bad weather, and you have to have a hard head also. Every facet of it, I like.

You started your career later, so do you think you can go on longer than an ordinary career?

Annemiek van Vleuten is 38, Mavi García is also 37. I don't think I will go on beyond that. I don't think I'll be older when I finish than a lot of riders, because I also want to do some other things in life.

What do you like away from cycling?

I like so many things; that's my problem. I am a medical doctor, and I was working in the hospital and I really liked that job. It was hard as well, but I do think about going back

◀ Wearing the leader's jersey at the Ceratizit Challenge, where she would finish second on GC

to that. I like engaging myself in politics and the community, and helping the community. There are many things.

Do you have a plan, a goal? Or is it just seeing what you are good at?

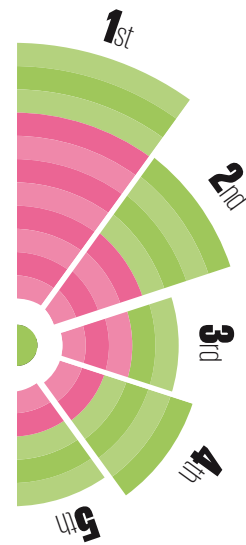
My plan is to see what life brings. For cycling, I will just keep going until I feel like I need to do something else. During this time, though, for sure I have the goal to become world champion in the individual time trial. This is something that I really have on my list, but it's not like if I become world champion I will stop. It's more if I feel like it is the moment to stop. There are goals in cycling, but life brings so many things, and I want to take those things, and if I feel that there's something new that I should try or do then I will change. I want to learn.

When you are coming to a big TT, how do you get into the mindset for it?

What I have found so interesting so far is that it is different every time. I thought you can always have the same state of mind approaching every time trial, but sometimes it feels different. I've learned that I just have to check how I am, how I approach it, how my head is, and then handle my head as I need it in that moment. For sure I have my strategy, but first I have to analyse my state of mind. It is not the same all the time, so I have no rule.

I guess if you are as happy as you seem, that is useful as well?

Yes, but you don't even need to be happy. Sometimes I'm not. In cycling you need to learn to feel yourself and understand yourself, because you have to get the best out of yourself and try and enjoy it. That's something I want to learn and adapt to the future in another job I have, because it is the same anywhere. Here you can learn to read your body and mind, and it's a great opportunity to learn. I think I'm doing that quite well. 📌



MAJOR RESULTS

● Time trial ● Road

Wins

European Championships - ITT 2021
 Stage, Ceratizit Challenge by La Vuelta 2021
 Stage, Simac Ladies Tour ITT 2021
 National Championships - Road Race 2021
 National Championships - ITT 2021
 National Championships - Road Race 2020
 National Championships - ITT 2020
 National Championships - ITT 2019
 European Games WE - ITT 2019
 Ljubljana-Domžale-Ljubljana TT 2019
 National Championships - ITT 2017

Seconds

World Championships - ITT 2021
 Ceratizit Challenge by La Vuelta 2021
 Simac Ladies Tour 2021
 Olympic Games - ITT 2021
 World Championships - ITT 2020
 Stage, BeNe Ladies Tour ITT 2019
 Stage, Women's Tour of Thailand 2019
 National Championships - Road Race 2017

Thirds

Tour de Suisse Women 2021
 Stage, Tour de Suisse Women 2021
 European Championships - ITT 2020
 Chrono Champenois - Trophée Européen 2019
 BeNe Ladies Tour ITT 2019

Fourths

Ladies Tour of Norway 2021
 Stage, Ladies Tour of Norway 2021
 Stage, Setmana Ciclista Valenciana 2020
 SwissEver GP Cham - Hagendorn 2019
 Festival Elsy Jacobs | Prologue 2019
 Chrono Champenois - Trophée Européen 2018

Fifths

Setmana Ciclista Valenciana 2020
 BeNe Ladies Tour | Prologue 2019
 Women's Tour of Thailand 2019
 Stage, Women's Tour of Thailand 2019
 National Championships - ITT 2018