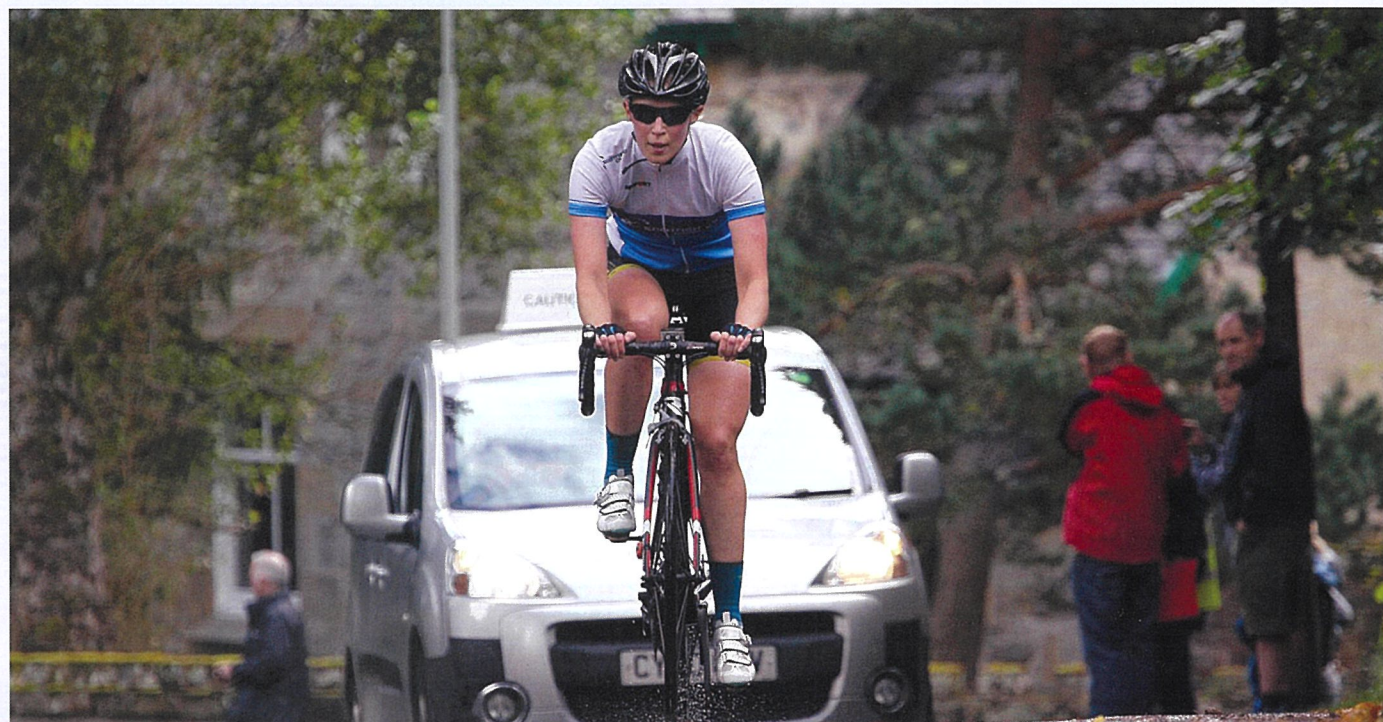




In 2017 Genevieve Whitson was the Scottish Road Series Champion

Elite cyclist joins NZ Avocado's corporate team

Genevieve Whitson's rural roots and university education are among the factors which enabled her to be an elite athlete, competing internationally, while also having a career in the rural sector.

By Elaine Fisher

Now corporate services associate with NZ Avocado, Genevieve has competed professionally in cycling for 15 years, achieving three Scottish National Road Cycling titles, and in 2018 her name was added to the Scottish Cycling Roll of Honour.

For a couple of years Genevieve did ride professionally based in France and Upstate New York in the United States, but when she worked for seven years at Scotland's Rural University College (SRUC), Genevieve continued to ride at the elite level, thanks to her employer's support. "The college had a great attitude to work/life balance, and I was able to take quite long periods of time out for cycling - up

to four months," says Genevieve who is also a member of Women in Horticulture.

"I had some great career progression at SRUC starting off as an executive assistant and moving into an international engagement alumni role, networking with other agricultural colleges around the globe and supporting marketing campaigns to raise awareness of the benefits of choosing an agricultural career path and staying connected as an alumni.

"I am glad I had completed my bachelor of arts degree from Otago University before taking up my racing career. The majority of women riding professionally don't receive

huge pay-packets, although that is improving with the introduction of a minimum wage in 2020, but a lot still work part-time. "However, some women I competed against who had come through national federation riding academies, had not been encouraged to also do studies in order to have a career after cycling."

Because of her family's heritage, Genevieve had always wanted to visit Scotland. "I had a desire to connect with family roots in Scotland. Even though the Scottish weather is pretty terrible, the landscape reminded me of rural Manawatu where I grew up, and when I got to Scotland I fell in love with it. It felt like home. Now I have two homes, one is New Zealand, the other is Scotland."

Scotland also offered Genevieve opportunities in cycling which were not available in New Zealand. She has competed in mountain biking, road cycling and Cyclo-cross and has ridden for New Zealand at four world championships. "In 15 years of competing, the worst accident I had resulted in a broken finger."

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In 2017-2018 Genevieve was under consideration for inclusion in the Scottish team for the Commonwealth Games. "When I was not selected and that final frontier had not worked out, together with the realisation that I was getting older, I lost the love for competing at that level."

Today she enjoys cycling for pleasure and is coaching a talented young road cyclist with aspirations to compete on the world stage.

Nine months ago, Genevieve joined NZ Avocado in Tauranga as corporate services associate working closely with chief executive Jen Scoular and the wider team to support a variety of projects. These include board meetings and governance, managing annual planning timelines and undertaking activities to progress delivery.

"No day is the same and there is some travel involved. I am also a bit of a chatterbox and I get to network and engage with a lot of people across the horticulture sector, which is really valuable for me to understand the world of avocados better.

"A highlight so far was our growers' forum in Whangarei. I've been away from New Zealand for a long time, and it's been really exciting to reconnect with parts of Aotearoa I am less familiar with, and meet some of the growers and stakeholders I deal with over the phone or via email."

Genevieve is a strong advocate for women to consider careers in horticulture. "The opportunities are not limited in the ways people might think. You could come into horticulture from many different backgrounds and have a successful career.

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"I would like to see more boards with even numbers for males and females and more pathways to the top in place for women in this sector, which is why the Women in Horticulture is such a great initiative helping to bridge this gap." ●



To keep up to date with Women in Horticulture news and activities, join the membership database by emailing info@women-in-hort.nz, everyone is welcome.



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