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tamboerskloof's

**carina  
bruwer**

flautist, swimmer  
and mom-to-be

shopping, people and lifestyle in your neighbourhood

# Water babe

When classical and jazz musician, Carina Bruwer of Tamboerskloof is not playing the flute for one of her two quartets, she breaks world records by swimming across shark-infested oceans for fun. By Hedi Lampert Kemper.

**C**arina Bruwer is scared of sharks, yet given half a chance, she's splashing around in the ocean. And it's not a quick dip at Muizenberg either, we're talking swimming across the great white infested waters of False Bay, from Rooi Els to Simon's Town – a distance of 36 kilometres, and a route considered by long-distance swimmers to be one of the toughest in the world. Around 30 people have tried and failed before because of overwhelming shark angst and the icy temperatures (wetsuits are prohibited in the official sport of long-distance swimming).

Twenty-eight-year-old Carina of Tamboerskloof is one of only four people who have succeeded in completing the swim. "On 26th February, 2006, I glided across in 11 hours, fuelled by Energade, bananas, marshmallows and oats. During my first attempt, a year prior to that, when the water was four degrees colder at 14°C, I had to stop after five hours from hypothermia. It was weird, because the last thing I remember before passing out was thinking how warm I felt and what pretty colours I was seeing in the water."

Carina had already conquered the English Channel, which is the 'Everest' of the sport. "I was in the water for 12 hours and three minutes – it shouldn't have been that long, but three kilometres before the end, I swam into a current and

got carried off course." On this occasion she managed to avoid hypothermia.

"You just have to make peace with the fact that there are sharks in the ocean. It's mentally very tough, but if you're going to think about what's down there, you're going to get out."

Carina says the Cape Long Distance Swimming Association is of the opinion that there are more sharks on the road and, apparently, no long-distance swimmer has ever been attacked in the water. "Anyway, we're doing what we love." This is all very well for Carina, but her poor mother is not nearly as well adjusted. "I often don't tell her I'm swimming or she drives me mad with phone calls. I let her read about it in the paper or hear it on the radio."

And there have been many opportunities for her mother to chew her nails to the quick, since Carina has swum the Robben Island crossing 10 times, and holds the overall record for swimming around Robben Island. Among other routes, she also swam around Cape Point, Cape Agulhas, rounded the northern-most tip of Africa off Tunisia, broke the female world record for crossing the Straits of

**LEFT:** Certainly not a fish out of water in the music world, Carina Bruwer is one of South Africa's top flautist.

**RIGHT:** "I never took swimming lessons, I just read a few books on technique, which improved things a bit. I'm just lucky to be a natural swimmer."

Gibraltar and completed a 26-kilometre swim in Greece just one week before her English Channel crossing.

### A duck to water

Although Carina is currently thought of as one of the top sportswomen in the country, she says she never considered herself a sporty person. "I was useless at running – after 100 metres, I'd pass out. And my family is not athletic, they're musicians and artists. I only took up swimming while I was studying music at university to achieve balance in my life – I didn't want to be stuck in a dark practice room for hours on end."

Carina swam four lengths on the first day and says she felt dead. "But I kept going back and the first time I managed one kilometre without stopping, it felt like the biggest achievement of my life." Six months later, she was swimming two kays a day. "I became addicted. I couldn't miss a day, but I still didn't think of myself as a swimmer, in fact I felt threatened by the *über* swimmers who hung around the pool." Then she made a new friend

at the pool who, to her dismay, thought she was a hot shot triathlete. "He told me I was wasting my talent, and suggested I compete in a 12-kilometre race from Simon's Town to Muizenberg."

**'You just have to make peace with the fact that there are sharks in the ocean'**

Her interest was piqued but she recalls thinking there was some error with the distance. "I called up the organisers and asked if it was a 1,2-kilometre swim. They laughed and assured me it was 12!"

The longest distance she had swum at this point was 4,5 kilometres. "During the race, I was constantly waiting to get tired, yet I just got stronger the further I went. I got into a rhythm. It was amazing to be out in the ocean. I was actually fitter than I thought. I even sped up towards the end and came first in the female category and seventh over all out of about 35 entrants."

### On dry land

Carina is equally accomplished out of the water. She currently plays flute in two all-female quartets. Ace performs mostly classical and some jazz pieces while Sterling is an electronic band comprising flute, cello and two violins. They play classical crossover, Vanessa Mae style with backing tracks of drum beats. "It's recognisable stuff, which people enjoy." Carina also runs her own company, Five Seasons Music. "I started the business as soon as I left varsity. I was faced with a dilemma; I had an honours degree cum laude in music which I could do precious little with except teach. I couldn't do orchestra work permanently, because I can't work for someone else. I'm too much of an individual."

She knew she needed to promote herself as a performer and saw a gap in the market to punt other musicians as well. "In the beginning, I had three acts on my books, one of them mine. It's evolved to 300. We represent musicians across the country, and have even handled bookings for Freshly Ground and Johnny Clegg."





### And baby makes three

And now, this busy girl is about to get busier – her first baby is due on 21 May. The father is 50-year-old Riccardo Pugliese. He's an art director in the film and advertising industry. "We've been friends for a long time and the age difference was an issue, but I fell in love with him as a person. It just works. We're not clingy, we're both very independent and don't need each other to define ourselves, but life is certainly seven million times better having him around," says Carina, but she adds there are no plans to marry. "I'd like to be with him forever but I don't see the need for a ring and I've never had a thing about a white dress and making promises in front of my friends. Anyway, we live like we're married." The busy pair has limited time together and they enjoy spending it at home. "He cooks well and I don't cook at all, we watch cheesy movies and chat a lot. Oh, and he's not at all sporty." And will motherhood curb her adventurous aquatic

spirit? "I don't think so," says Carina, "I may not be as obsessive about the big crossings, since I've achieved most of what I want to, but there are always fun long-distance swims and I won't stop doing them. I love the sport too much."

### Carina's A List

**Dines out** at The Codfather in Camps Bay ☎ 021-438-0782/3.

**Loves freshly baked country loaf** at Manna Epicure on Kloof Street ☎ 021-426-2413.

**Shops for yummy things** at Newport Market and Deli, Mouille Point ☎ 021-439-1538 and Giovanni's Deli in Greenpoint ☎ 021-434-6893.

**Gets her clothes** from YDE at the V&A Waterfront ☎ 021-425-6232.

**Info**  
www.carinabruwer.com.

**ABOVE:** Mom-to-be Carina admits over a cup of tea: "I'm a little too competitive. It's in me to drive myself as far as I can go."

**RIGHT:** Carina has conquered most of the challenges she's set herself in the long-distance swimming arena.



Carina's preggie dress courtesy of Gravida at the Waterfront