



A woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a bright pink short-sleeved athletic top, light purple shorts, a white headband, and Asics socks and shoes, is captured in a dynamic running pose. She is running on a paved path with a dark, rocky landscape and a clear blue sky in the background.

'I FEEL MENTALLY STRONGER THAN EVER'

Record-breaking triathlete and Asics athlete Lucy Charles-Barclay, 31, talks about coming back from injury, her 'never give up' mentality, and why it's so important to listen to your body

Interview: Joanna Ebsworth | Photography: Holly Charles

'I felt real a mix of emotions when I won the 2023 Ironman World Championships. After coming second so many times [in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2022], I felt like a pressure and a weight had finally been lifted off my shoulders, so I went into 2024 feeling the happiest, most positive I'd ever felt as an athlete. I knew I wanted to achieve more in my sport, but I hoped I could maybe try something a bit different to challenge myself in new ways. I didn't feel any pressure going into the new year as the reigning World Champion. I just felt like it was a fresh year full of new opportunities. Obviously, that was going to be challenging off the back of a big injury I'd sustained, but I've always loved a challenge.

'An Ironman is an ultra-endurance race consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.22-mile run. About one mile into the running leg of the World Championships, I started to feel some pain in my calf, which was quite bad. I was like, "Oh, this doesn't feel good". But I had about a 12-minute lead at that point, having led from the start, and I decided there was no way I was going to give up when I'd come that far. If I was going to win, it was going to be on that day, and the whole crowd was even saying, "This is your time, this is your race". They just didn't know how much agony I was in.

'I pushed myself harder than ever before during that race because no amount of physical pain would have been worse than not winning the title after coming second four times. So, I just took it one step at a time, made it to the end of the race, and won. Once I got home, we looked at the extent of the damage and I had a pretty big



Mentally, Charles-Barclay achieved more in 2024 than any other year of her career

tear in my left calf. Rehabilitation was long, and I had about two-and-a-half months off from running. But it was okay because I'd achieved what I've been dreaming of for so many years.

'Since then, I've had a bit of an attitude change, and I put my health first now. No goal is ever going to be as big as that goal was to me, so I decided to recover really well from the injury I'd sustained. We did extensive

rehabilitation on that calf and, touch wood, it's been really good, so putting in the work was definitely worth it. I got the green light to start running again on January 1, 2024, but I couldn't just go out and run a 5K. I basically started off with running for 30 seconds and then walking for 30 seconds, building up my runs gradually.

'I really wanted to get back on the start line at the beginning of

March, which in hindsight was probably a bit too soon, but I made it. My result in that race was a lot better than expected, and I think that is a testament to the work we [Charles-Barclay and her team] did. The rehab is ongoing, and I'm always doing strength and conditioning training, which in a way is whole-body rehabilitation to prevent injury. When you are an endurance athlete, you often peak in your mid-30s, so keeping your body strong and robust is very important. Thankfully, I really enjoy strength and conditioning training in the gym, so it's not too much of a chore for me.

'Despite feeling in good shape, I had to pull out of the London T100 triathlon race in July during the running leg due to an ongoing Achilles issue, which is probably linked to my calf injury. It was extremely tough having to pull the pin on that race because I never really get to race on home soil, but the Ironman World Championships were soon afterwards in September, and I didn't want to make things worse because trying to get another world title trumps everything else. I had to be sensible, put my health first, and make sure I had a speedy recovery. If I had continued in that race, my recovery might have been a lot longer, but we managed to get over it very quickly and I went away and had an amazing training block.

'Defending my title wasn't initially part of the plan for 2024, but my season got off to a way better start than I anticipated. In June, I won the Ironman France in Nice, which was the same course that the 2024 Ironman World Championships were going to be held on. The crowds were phenomenal, I felt amazing,

and I set a new course record, so deciding to compete in the World Champs felt like the right choice. I felt like I was in the best shape of my life, and I was confident I could deliver on the course again.

'Unfortunately, two days before the World Champs, I was doing a shakeout run when I felt a pain in my other calf that felt very similar to what I'd experienced in Kona. We had it scanned, and I was told it could be fine, and

'IT'S IMPORTANT TO ALLOW YOURSELF TO RECUPERATE AND REST – PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY'



Rehab was slow and extensive

I might make it through the race, or I might end up injuring it in the same way as my left calf. I consulted with my medical team in the UK, and they said that while I was in great shape, and the injury was small, it could become huge. Ultimately, they told me they thought competing just wasn't worth the risk.

'That was probably the lowest point in my entire career. And knowing I was in great shape made the decision to pull out even harder. But once I got home and my leg was re-scanned, my doctor reassured me I had 100 per cent made the correct decision, which made things a little easier. I feel like it's always one extreme or the other with me, but I guess sport is a bit like that. You're either riding the highest high or you are having a low. But I'm staying positive and trying to stay fit, which is good.

'It's so important to know your body and its limits. As an athlete, you learn to listen to signals every single day. The best-case scenario is that you start to detect something early on in training before it becomes something big. But it's also about being smart, which can sometimes mean making really, really difficult decisions, and choosing your long-term career over a big result. That can be hard at the time when you're feeling low and trying to navigate the situation, but you soon forget that when you get another good result later on.

'It's important to allow yourself to rest and recuperate, not just your physical self, but for your mind as well. Physically, I healed very fast from my second calf injury, but I had to deal with it mentally, too. And that took a bit longer because I'd look back at all the great photos from my

training camp and I'd feel really sad because I was doing incredibly well and delivering in training, but I didn't get to show that to the world. But then my team reminded me about the shape I did manage to get into in a six-week camp, and they

reminded me not to spiral, but to take the time to let my mind recover. As an athlete, I'm definitely all or nothing, but I'm trying to find that nice middle ground where I'm letting my mind relax while physically keeping myself ticking along.

'I have one main goal for 2025, which is to compete at the Ironman World Championships. They will be back in Hawaii, so that really excites me. And, they'll also be happening in October, so I feel like I have plenty of time to build and be in the best possible shape for that. That's the only goal I've set so far, and I'm sure there'll be others dotted around the year, but that's the biggest one.

'Christmas has always been a big thing for me and my husband [former professional triathlete and her coach, Reece Barclay]. We spend all year away from our families, so it's the one time that we make sure we get everyone together and have a lovely time before heading off to do our warm-weather training at the beginning of the new year. We've hosted Christmas for the past three years in the UK and we're hosting again this year. We still train, but it's not full-on, and we allow ourselves to enjoy that time with our family. When you're halfway through the new

Asics Superblast 2 is key to the new range



'Recently, I wrote down what I had achieved this year outside of my racing results, and realised that, in terms of learning and personal development, I'd achieved more than in any other year of my career. Externally, some people might say I had a terrible year because I only did three races, but internally, I think what I've learned and how I've developed as an athlete has helped me to grow more than ever. Being an athlete isn't just about the gold medals, and the times, and the results. How you're developing and growing as a person and as an athlete is just as important. Mentally, I feel stronger than ever, and if I can keep my body healthy physically, I really do believe I could have a great year next year.

LUCY CHARLES-BARCLAY'S WORKOUT WARDROBE

Discover these favourite picks from the new Lucy Charles-Barclay X ASICS range



Asics Gel-Kayano 31, £180
 'What I love about the Gel-Kayano 31 shoes is they allow me to run further for longer, and the extra cushioning means I feel supported from start to finish. They are the most comfortable shoes that provide a little bit of extra stability when needed, so I can do more miles and push further, which allows me to achieve my goals easier than I did before. Whenever I am training, these are my go-to shoes.'



brilliant for shielding you from the cold and wind. Plus, it scrunches down into the little pocket on the back, so it's super convenient to take out with you and whip it out on-the-go if you get a bit cold or it starts raining.'

Asics Metarun Packable Gilet, £85

'I love this gilet because it looks great and has lots of technical details that make it perfect for those days when you're not sure what the weather is doing. It's lightweight and breathable but



Asics Metarun Split Short, £67

'I've been doing a lot of running in these two-in-one shorts and they've really withstood the test of time. They keep you well covered, help you to feel supported, and they're super functional because they have multiple pockets for you to stash your gels, keys and phone. They're also extremely soft and comfortable, which is key because you don't want your shorts to rub when running long distances.'

‘WHAT I’VE LEARNED AS AN ATHLETE HELPED ME TO GROW MORE’



season and maybe feeling a bit burned out, you don't want to look back and wonder why you sacrificed that one day - especially if you're not having the best year in terms of results.

‘My whole family is sporty, so it’s quite the tradition for us to all get new running shoes on Christmas Day and take them out for a run or head to a parkrun if there’s one happening near us. We love watching Christmas films, too. My parents, sister and I always used to watch *It’s a Wonderful Life* on Christmas Eve, so I’m sure we’ll watch that at some point. We’re also big into playing games, but I definitely get too competitive. I once played Snap with one of our friends and he said he’d never play with me again because I was too competitive.

‘I wanted my new capsule collection for Asics to really

embody my “never give up” spirit, so that whatever happens, you just always try to push forwards in the best way you can. I’m known as The Mermaid for my swim strength, so I wanted the collection to reflect that too, especially with the shoe which the collection is built around. Having that mermaid power is about believing in yourself, being positive, and moving forward, and I honestly couldn’t believe the amazing job the designers did to bring that mermaid spirit to life with the colours and patterns. Asics’s tagline is “sound mind, sound body”, and that’s a crucial part of this collection. It’s also been a huge part of my journey as an athlete this year, making sure I’ve got that sound mind to help me have the sound body, and I hope anyone who gets a piece from this collection takes that philosophy into their training and their life.

‘I always think if I look good, I feel good. So, I love that the whole collection matches from head-to-toe in my favourite colours. I wanted to create something for a female audience that helps them look strong and feminine at the same time, so they can get out there, feel at their best and run well. We shouldn’t have to shy away from wanting to look good. We shouldn’t have to fit into a box. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to wear colourful kit or braid your hair or put make-up on. For too long, we’ve maybe been told we can’t do that. But you know what? We want to feel good and look good while we’re exercising. That’s all part of being a female athlete. And we should celebrate that.’ 🏆

The Lucy Charles-Barclay x ASICS Collection is available now at asics.com