

Performance Driven: Kelsey-Lee Barber

18/12/2023 World-class athletes require meticulous preparation and the best resources to reach the top of their sports. Fuelled by Taycan-levels of energy, their dedicated pursuit of excellence often resembles the road Porsche has taken for 75 years. Porsche Cars Australia speaks to some of the country's most talented athletes to discover the essence of their performance-driven approach, and how they recharge to reach their next podium destination.

Kelsey-Lee Barber aims high. She also aims far. In relatively short time, this world-beating track and field athlete has left an indelible mark on the sport of javelin, amassing a long list of sporting successes.

But for someone at the forefront of their chosen sport, Kelsey was uncharacteristically late.

“My journey with javelin came about through school athletics carnivals,” she says with a tone of fondness. “I must admit my first event was discus, but I won a schools event with the javelin when I was 17 and I felt like my path was set out ahead of me. This was the event that was going to get me to the Olympics. So I wholeheartedly dived into it.”

Ironically, it was Kelsey's ability to throw far and straight that became her pivotal moment. That first big win propelled her onto a new trajectory. The next five years would see her competing with the sport's best performers, but her climb to the top would test her dedication and drive.

"I had a career-defining injury early on. I was only 21 years of age. I'd suffered a ligament tear in my elbow. I sat down with a doctor and the question was 'Is the target to heal this injury and enjoy life? Or is the focus on being an elite athlete?' For me, there was no doubt: I wanted a career in this sport."

It was a big decision. Kelsey had yet to earn a spot on an international javelin team and she was already facing a steep road to recovery. Reflecting on that pivotal moment, she admires her younger self's resolute conviction.

"I look back at that moment and see I was so determined. I knew exactly what I wanted in life. Well done to my younger self for feeling so driven in those early years of my career."

She made a wise choice and backed it with tremendous commitment. Aged 22, Kelsey earned her first Commonwealth games medal. She threw 62.95 metres at the Glasgow games to earn Bronze. It was a defining moment. It cemented her place on the world stage. It also cemented her future direction.

"The bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games solidified what I wanted to be doing," she says. "I wanted to pursue javelin to the highest level this sport could offer. It meant going on tour, it meant working towards the Olympic Games, and ultimately podium finishes at major championships."

It's all in the preparation

Kelsey's drive to win is evident in everything she does. It's no surprise, given her emphasis on preparation.

"It's all about what we can do to improve my throwing," she says. "What do we need to do from a physical perspective to get the most out of the javelin? This applies to both the physical training that's needed and the mental preparation that goes with it.

"I was fortunate to find a sports psychologist very early in my career. I think it's the mental preparation that can really fill in the gaps of how to get the most out of yourself in those high performance, high pressure moments."

There have been plenty of them. Two Olympic Games (Rio in 2016 and Tokyo in 2020). Three Commonwealth Games (2014, 2018, 2022, where she won Bronze, Silver and Gold respectively.) Two Gold medals at the IAAF World Athletics Championships; the first in 2019 at Doha, Qatar, and the second in 2022 at Oregan in the USA, where she threw a monster 66.91 metres to claim victory. There are many others, including holding the World Number 1 ranking for 44 weeks.

Earning these remarkable results takes a performance-driven mindset.

“The most difficult part for me is managing my body and managing the demands of my sport. When you watch a javelin thrower in action, it can look like an elegant form of power – but there is a lot of force going through their body.

“I've had some significant injuries and tough periods during my career. I've had to manage these and find ways to train or come up with creative ideas to get the most out of myself when I'm sore or hurting, especially when I’m standing on the top of the runway and need to give my absolute best.”

Driven to perform

Kelsey loves preparing for world-stage events. Despite their scale and prizes, it's when the Queensland athlete rises.

“I crave those big moments. I love them. I love the crowd. I love the energy. I love the atmosphere and I love that I'm asked to perform under these circumstances. We train all year round for these moments and they are the greatest opportunities for me to show what I can do with the javelin.”

For Kelsey, this is when everything intersects. And it's at this junction where performance comes to life.

“It's the moment when I’m able to embrace the physical preparation, the mental preparation and the emotional preparation. When they come together they allow me to express the best version of myself as freely as possible, with absolutely no hesitation and nothing holding me back.

“I get the most out of myself and the most out of my throws when I can stay present in the moment and stay process driven. When I can be in this space, when I believe I have it within me to throw the distance, and when I allow myself to express with the javelin, that's when my best performances emerge.”

Recharging the power to win

The intensity of Kelsey’s training and competition can be taxing, even for an athlete of her calibre. It is why she says recharging regularly is critical.

“It is important to turn up to training each day and give it your all,” she says. “And to do that you need to recharge both physically and mentally.

“For me, the physical side can be as simple as putting my feet up and just taking a rest. Sleep is the best thing. And mentally, it can come from either socialising with friends or simply being in the kitchen, cooking recipes and baking; doing something that's completely unrelated to athletics.”

Recharging also provides one other essential advantage.

“You give yourself an opportunity to reflect. These moments of reflection determine what you take out of the current training session and how you move forward into the next session. These moments of reflection are like bridges. Without them, you don't come into the next session with clarity. And without that clarity, there's no focused purpose to that next session. Recharging brings you to the next day motivated and focused with real clarity about why you're there and what you're trying to execute for that session.”

The process works. Kelsey's trophy cabinet proves it.

“You need to keep challenging and evolving to find what works for you. It's how you create the best version of yourself. You can see the same process at work across Porsche's 75-year history. It's a dedication to the pursuit of excellence.”

It is a fascinating parallel. It's not the only one she makes. She also sees similarities between Porsche's first EV and her chosen sport.

“The Taycan has this elegant delivery of power,” she says. It's remarkable so much performance can lie beneath all that athletic beauty.”

Info

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