

It's a race that requires a mesmerizing mix of strength and endurance; one that pushes the fittest of the fittest. And now, after a steady start, the fitness phenomenon that is HYROX has finally found its stride. HYROX is a functional fitness race which involves an eight-kilometer (almost five-mile) run interspersed with functional exercises. Competitors are able to compete in teams, pairs or by themselves. No matter the age or ability, the race is for everyone. HYROX's first iteration in 2017 saw 618 participants, while now it boasts more than 210,000 across 30 countries. CNN recently spoke to two women at the forefront of HYROX's charge to discover what life is like at the top. Meg Jacoby is the newly crowned world champion, demolishing the elite women's field at the World Championship. The American was the first ever woman to complete a HYROX race in under one hour and only recently. After she crossed the finish line, cementing her first world title, Jacoby fell to the floor in an equal measure of exhaustion. "My daughter has sacrificed just as much, if not more, than I have because she's sacrificing a lot of time with me," she says. "It felt like it was all worth it. Having her there was just really, really special. She gets to witness so many of my moments." Jacoby only heard about HYROX in 2022. She signed up for the New York race later that year and started training. Despite admitting to some errors during her first race, Jacoby delivered an impressive time in New York City. "At that point, I knew I should probably go all in. It was pretty crazy to have that kind of success so quickly," she says. Despite somewhat stumbling upon HYROX, Jacoby had unknowingly been preparing for the sport for years. Her competitive streak was evident from an early age, with sports playing a major role in her upbringing. During college, she was an impressive middle-distance runner and has since competed in long-distance events. Before discovering HYROX, when people asked Jacoby what she was training for in the gym, her answer was always "I don't know." Jacoby has now quit her day job to focus fully on being a professional athlete. She runs up to seven times a week and combines endurance sessions with hours in the gym. Jacoby says, "You can have a lot of success in this without having to do that type of volume," she says. "That's just kind of where I'm at and what I know works for me and what my body needs." Jacoby knows the importance of diet and recovery. She aims to sleep at least eight hours every night. "My diet is very boring," she laughs. "It's a lot of chicken and rice. It's kind of mundane, but that's kind of what I eat." Despite being in gladiator-like shape, even Jacoby struggles to describe what a HYROX race feels like. "I think all of us at this level are a little bit crazy," she says, explaining why she has picked such a grueling sport. "I'm always discovering more and more about myself as a person, pushing myself to my limits and kind of breaking them." Jacoby says the sense of community is another reason she dedicates her life to HYROX and says she loves the sport. She is also aware of another athlete, from London, who is excelling at the other end of the scale – with Celia Duff, who is 70, was recently crowned world champion in the 70-74 category – an accolade to go with her many achievements. She has also been a world record holder twice but is quick to point out that both her records have since been broken. "I have an allotment, I have chickens, I have a dog. I help with the grandchildren, when help is needed," she says. Like Jacoby, Duff found the sport of HYROX somewhat by mistake. Duff's daughter was an early adopter of the sport. Duff had always kept herself fit – she was a good rower during her youth and stepped up her fitness routine as she aged. Incredibly, though, she went on to break the world record for her 65-69 category, in a time which qualified her for the World Championship. Duff says there is only a "tiny" number of people her age competing in HYROX – perhaps unsurprising given the physical demands. But for Duff, a retired public health doctor, the sport gives her focus and the training helps her to stay young. The grandmother runs three times a week, mixing up the pace and distance of each session. She also enjoys the social aspect of the sport. "It's incredibly important to keep mobile and strong as you get older because, if you don't, the rate at which you decline is much faster," she says. "I want to be strong and functionally fit. That's the key to HYROX." Dubbed the "Badass Gran," Duff isn't altogether comfortable with being called an "inspiration" to others. "I'm genuinely humble and grateful," she says. "If I can encourage older people or anybody, actually, just to get moving, that's great." Despite her short but impressive career as a HYROX athlete, Duff says it would be "bonkers" for her to consider a professional career. However, she does plan on competing with her daughter in a doubles event later this year and wants to continue to improve. Duff and Jacoby are proof that something is working for HYROX.

The business was set up in 2017 by events organizer Christian Toetzke and three-time Olympic hockey player, Alexander Färstén. Färstén says the concept took a while for people to understand and the business was badly hampered in its early years. Now, though, HYROX is seeing exponential growth and is racing to catch up with the increased demand. "It took time to break through in a certain way, to really get into that wider range of people, seeing what