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t the start of 2013, British Cycling boldly announced its plans to get 'One million more women on bikes by 2020.' It's fair to say that things are moving along more swiftly than many anticipated, but how do the professional riders see this progress and how has it affected their own environment?

This year, elite women's road cycling has received more coverage than ever. We've been inspired by The Women's Tour; my own Twitter feed was alive with excitement and anticipation. The Milk Race returned to Nottingham in May with an elite women's race – only the second year an elite women's race has taken place in the long history of the event – and it was streamed live. Coinciding with the final stage of the 2014 Tour de France, the elite of women's cycling also came together for the first edition of La Course by Le Tour de France on 27 July. A few hours before the men's peloton arrived in Paris, the world's elite female cyclists raced the circuit in front of an enthralled crowd of spectators, with live TV coverage, before fighting out a final sprint at the finish line on the Champs-Élysées.

So, 2014 is proving to be quite a year for women's cycling. But there's still a way to go before the grandeur of women's cycling matches that of the men's sport. I met up with Olympic Track Champion Laura Trott OBE and reigning World and European Team Pursuit Champion Katie Archibald, and asked them about the changes they've seen in women's cycling over the last couple of years...



*The profile of pro women's cycling has seen a huge increase since London 2012*

## 'We're in that fortunate situation where we can see the men's side of the sport and the potential that is there, and that really pushes it on the accelerated path of development'

**LT** The Women's Tour was a massive step forward for women's cycling, especially to have it around Britain. When I first started cycling, you'd see the odd woman out on her bike, but it's grown so much. People are starting to forget about what they look like. When I first started, wearing a helmet was just not cool, but now because more and more people do, it's become almost a fashion thing. And Breeze rides, which are massive and cater just for women, are helping to push women's cycling forward.

**KA** I've only become competitive in the sport over the last few years and I've seen a massive upward curve. We're in that fortunate situation where we can see the men's side of the sport and the potential that is there, and that really pushes it on the accelerated path of development. Women are getting bigger results – it's inspiring a younger generation, the fields are getting bigger, the crowds are getting bigger and everything just feeds off each other, until you have a really exciting atmosphere of people thrilled by a sport.

### What changes do you feel are still needed?

**LT** Getting races televised is really helpful. We need people to be able to see races, so they're not just happening behind the scenes.

**KA** At the moment, British Cycling has a fantastic development path for track riders. I think the argument that comes with this is the development path for road riding. It's a lot more accessible. With road cycling, a bike is so many different things: it's people enjoying a ride with their local club, it's people enjoying sportives, riding out with their family, it's a lifestyle

really. It's not just about how to make people win medals at the Olympics, but the bigger picture – how we get more people out and enjoying cycling – and I think that's what British Cycling is going for at the moment.

### We're seeing the market really step up its focus on women, with brands adopting marketing strategies aimed specifically at women. How can we keep that momentum and interest alive?

**LT** Having specific brands just for women helps female cyclists. I know for women, putting Lycra on isn't always a top choice, so having nice things that aren't always pink obviously helps. I know adidas has just brought out a women's clothing range, which is quite casual and helps you not to feel like you stand out. These kinds of things are great at helping women's cycling to keep growing.

**KA** That's a difficult question, as I'm on the other side. I'm already interested. Without opportunities, there'll be no interest. It's the same for track cycling; the velodromes need to be more accessible. The taster sessions are great and it works well for both sides. The velodromes get their money back and the sessions spark enthusiasm and interest.

### Our tagline is to "ride happy". From a personal perspective, what is it about the sport that made you fall in love with it?

**LT** I just love the freedom of it. I know people think that I just ride on the track, but I obviously train on the road as well. I can ride for two hours and my head is completely clear when I get back. It's the fresh air and the fact it can also be a really sociable sport. I always used to do it with my family. It used to be the only time that I spent quality time with my dad. Now, it's like a fun time with the girls, so for me, it's a really sociable thing!

**KA** I can't lie, I like to win! There's something very satisfying about giving something your all and knowing you went in there and gave it everything you've got, and you're now totally empty. It's great coming back from a ride knowing you did all you could. I love that feeling! 🚴



*Pro women's cycling is gaining a reputation for building exciting atmospheres for crowds*