‘I have always wanted to ride for a WorldTour team and to ride at the pinnacle of the sport’

For Lisa Bone, reaching the highest level of professional cycling has taken a different route from that of many riders who turn professional at a young age.

The 27-year-old South African has signed a two-year contract with EF Education–Oatly, an American-registered Women’s WorldTour team, and will ride for them in 2027 and 2028. For years she has balanced racing with work as a physiotherapist, a path very different from that of riders who turn professional young. Podcast host Jeremy Ford described the signing as the team’s first African rider and only the third African woman to join the WorldTour.

“I have always wanted to ride for a WorldTour team and to ride at the pinnacle of the sport,” Bone said in the team’s announcement on October 21. “I want to be on a team, I want to be racing and I want to do the biggest races in the world against the best people in the world.”

“A pinch me situation”

The deal was kept quiet for weeks, and Bone says it did not feel real even after she signed.

“It’s been a bit of a pinch me situation for the past month and a half,” she told Jeremy Ford on the Africa Rising Cycling Podcast. “I haven’t really been able to tell people what’s going on. You sign a little piece of paper, and you tell your boss you’re quitting your job, and that’s basically what it was until it actually got announced.”

That changed once she was added to the team’s WhatsApp group and began getting plans for a team camp in November. “Everything is feeling very real. It’s, in a way, a lot of pressure, but in a good way.”

She says she has decided to commit fully for the next few years. “I can’t think of a better platform than EF Education.”

Cycling was not Bone’s first sport. She played competitive field hockey before turning to the bike while building her career in physiotherapy. For the past four years she has raced for South African club Cycle Nation Enza Construction, building

her results through domestic and international races.

That path caught the attention of EF Education–Oatly general manager Esra Tromp. “Lisa has forged her own path to the WorldTour,” Tromp said. She pointed to Bone’s sporting background and her decision to keep working as a physiotherapist while she raced. Coming from a country with no established route into the WorldTour, Tromp added, Bone has shown she can create opportunities for herself and make bold decisions.

Many riders reach the WorldTour through development teams and Continental or ProContinental squads. Bone says African women do not have that option.

“There isn’t really a pipeline for African women,” she said. She hopes a new South African team will start to change that: “I think it’s going to be a big opening for South African women to make their way to European racing. But without them, there actually isn’t a way.”

So she made her own. “I really wanted to do this, so I just started emailing hundreds of people,” she said. “I actually got one response out of all of them, and that was from Visma.”

Visma told her she needed more experience, which Bone understood. “I’m coming from a club team in South Africa, where the racing is completely different to racing in Europe.”

Bone asked Mauritian rider Kim Le Court-Pienaar, who had made the same jump, for advice. The answer was simple: keep going. “She said, just continue emailing everyone. Email a million people.” Le Court-Pienaar also told her to get an agent, who could bridge the gap between South Africa and Europe.

Bone contacted agent Natasha Carnarvon, who had already been watching her. “She said, I know who you are, I’ve been watching you for the whole year, I’ve been waiting for you to message me.” Carnarvon is also a physiotherapist.

She then arranged a second round of interviews, this time with Visma and EF. “In the time span of two days, all the interviews happened, and all of a sudden I had a contract.”

The emails took real work. Bone researched what each team stood for and whether it valued rider development, and she attached her CV to every message. “It’s worth

the time and effort when you do get responses. When you don’t, it feels really dehumanising and a bit of a waste of time. But I’ve proved that it’s not.”

Her 2026 results backed the emails up. Bone won the Cape Town Cycle Tour, took silver in both the South African road and gravel national championships, and won the UCI Gravel World Series event Around The Pot by 16 minutes. She was second at The Ceder and finished in the top 10 at the Bucks County Classic.

At the African Road Cycling Championships in Kisumu, Kenya, she took silver in the elite women’s road race behind compatriot Magda Nieuwoudt, with Tiffany Keep completing a South African podium sweep.

Gravel has given Bone racing and exposure, partly because South Africa’s road scene is struggling. “In South Africa, the road scene is struggling at the moment, so more mountain bikers and road riders would all go do the gravel, so that’s why I started to move to gravel,” she said in comments published by the team. But her ambitions are elsewhere.

“I enjoy gravel but my dreams and ambitions are still on the road,” she said. “I love how it’s very, very tactical. It’s a team sport and you have to work as a team, which I really enjoy.”

At EF she will race stage races and mountain stages, which are new to her after years of one-day events. She has spent the past year improving her aerobic capacity while building strength for short, hard efforts.

“That’s one of my main goals of coming to Europe in the first place,” she said. “I want to get to a point where I am the best rider that I could possibly be, and the only way that I can do that at the moment is by coming to Europe and racing more and more against the best.”

The move means leaving family and friends, and Bone is open about the discomfort. “If you aren’t scared and you’re not doing things that are out of your comfort zone, then you’re not pushing yourself to be better,” she said. “I can’t wait for next year to come. I’ll be leaving family and friends, and everything, but I actually can’t think of a better reason for it.”

She joins a growing group of African women in the peloton. South Africa’s Ashleigh Moolman-Pasio spent years among the world’s best, and Le Court-Pienaar won

Liège–Bastogne–Liège Femmes in 2025 and became the first African woman to wear the yellow jersey at the Tour de France Femmes. Bone also names South Africans Byron Munton and Carla Oberholzer as influences.

Her story also shows how much still depends on individual effort. Access to professional teams, sponsorship and international racing remains limited for many African women, and for riders without a team pipeline, the road to Europe is still a long list of emails to send.