

## BUSSELTON IRONMAN70.3, 1 May 2016

by Ross Weiter

“Life is a journey” the old saying goes.

Or perhaps it is more of a collection of journeys: childhood, studies, career, kids, climbing, owning a house, relationships and the like. Setting sail for a half-Ironman was a journey of six months, an inward journey into my own body and psyche.

It is not easy to fit 10 hours a week of training into a life that is already full: at the peak of training I was cycling 160km, running 25km and swimming 4km every week. This is hardly shattering by any athletic standard but it was plenty enough for me. I took some old advice from an old book and tried to fit the training into my life rather than fitting life around training. But it works both ways, of course.

It is called IRONMAN 70.3 because that is the total distance covered, in miles. In metric units this means 1.9 km of swimming, 90 km cycling and 21.1 km running (half-marathon), a total of 113km. Sometimes it is called a half-Ironman as the full IRONMAN is double the above distances.

On this journey, I had three personal goals, in this order of importance: 1. Get to the starting line, 2. Get to the finish line and 3. Do a time under 6 hours.

Getting to the starting line is not mundane. Looking at the race stats, it seems that 12% of the people who pay up and register never actually show up for the event. My guess would be that a good portion of them get injured in training. According to literature, the main causes of injury are: too fast, too long and too hard. Where the actual limit is a bit hard to judge the first time around; I mean how does one know where the personal red line is until one steps over it?

I had some idea of how I can do in the individual events, having done three 4km open water swims, one marathon, and four bike events in the 130-160km range in the preceding years. But that told me little about what it would be like to combine the events into one triathlon, although with shorter lengths. How would my body cope with training for three sports AT THE SAME TIME? So this is how it became a journey about getting to know myself.

In the end I did lots of swimming and cycling, but was only able to train for running in the last 6 weeks, having suffered from a persistent Achilles pain of indeterminate origin: Xrays and MRI showed no degradation, physio discovered zero weakness. In a finger to the advice of traditional medicine of “stop and rest”, at the peak of my training the pain went away and I could add running to the training schedule. Go, figure.

Once started, getting to the finish line is less difficult but 4% of the signed up field fails there also. During the event I saw some bike crashes and some seriously cramped up runners, despite the cold.

The third goal seemed quite achievable. Although the worldwide average for my gender and age group is 6 hours, the Busselton race is half an hour faster so aiming for 6 hours was setting the bar pretty low. But it also ensured that I finished with a smile. The event itself was great fun and I enjoyed all of it immensely, except for the last 1hour of the run where I was bothered by an upcoming cramp of my quads (which never actually happened in the end). The Busso iM70.3 is superbly organised, with many volunteers assisting the 1700 individuals and 400 teams competing in the event.

Part of the reason for having fun was that I came prepared with new bike tubes and tyres, checklists for everything and a very supportive partner, who made all the difference to my mental state, which ended up being not stressed at all on the day. I knew I could do it.

I made 5:55 finishing time, walked around in circles for 10min to cool down and then walked out of the recovery area with a big smile, no injury, and a memory of a life time. Next year I would like to have a go at the full IRONMAN, life and health permitting. I look forward to it already.

After the finish I caught up with Julie Kerr and Rick Allen, both friends of mine and endless sources of inspiration. Although physically much smaller and older than me, both finished in a faster time, which was hardly surprising: Julie (who won her age group at Busso) won the Kona IRONMAN world champs two years ago and Rick last year won the Piolet d'Or for ascent of the Mazeno Ridge of Nanga Parbat, an amazing feat of mountaineering, personal suffering and endurance.

Lessons learned - I am listing these for those people who contemplate a similar journey and for myself as a reminder next year:

1. The 4 checklists were super useful: check-in, morning, T1, T2, stuff for after.
2. Bike bento box is much better than stuffing food in back pockets.
3. Don't drink too much on a cold day (12-16C): it was annoying having to stop at a loo twice during the cycle. Since I trained in much warmer temperatures I was used to drinking heaps more. In the end, 800mL was too much for 3 hours of cycling!!
4. Due to the toilet stops I was thanking my decision NOT to buy a once piece tri suit. What a hassle that would have been. The Orca two piece was perfect for taking off quick.
5. I had the bright idea to wear both my heart rate monitor and wrist display during the swim, so as to save time putting it on in T1. Only later I discovered that the 30m water resistance rating actually means that it is not good enough for swimming. So that explains why the wrist unit (Polar FT7) died in the water and I had no heart info for the whole event. But it came back to life on Monday!! Duh.
6. It's all about the run. This is where it goes to shit, or not. Run heaps. I could not, for health reasons, and it slowed down my cycling also (to preserve energy). I can go faster on the bike. 30 kph speed was saving myself for the run but it is so much easier to pick up time on the bike than on the run because bike is the longest leg (time).
7. I should eat more on the run. On the bike I was pigging out, consuming 2 gels and a fruit wrap (70g of carbs) every hour. On the run I did only 1 gel per hour, relying on the 600ml Pepsi for most energy. That was not enough. In the last hour I was tired.
8. The 1.9km swim is easy in a wetsuit...especially when drafting someone for half of it as I managed to do. Sneaky, eh? Unlike bike-drafting, swim-drafting is legal.
9. I need to do stretching and core exercises!!

Ok that was enough of that for now, I am going rock climbing again.



Ross