

Long Distance World Championships Race Report: courtesy of Richard Burnell.

Well - after finally working my way through getting DNF against my name at Busso because of a timing chip "costume malfunction", and having braved the lousy winter weather to train for this truly iconic event, including running up and down the English canal towpath for two weeks while my wife sipped champagne with the rest of my family, race day finally loomed. We all checked the long range weather forecasts each night and as the end of October drew near, it was clear that it was going to be a challenging day. But as I heard one father say to a nervous competitor at transition, "it is what it is - so get over it and get out there!"

For those tragic triathletes amongst us who keep training diaries, I started the training a week after the BHIM, and come race day had swum 150km, ridden 3,500km and run 800km. So I knew that I had done the work.

There was a short Aquathlon on Thursday - 1km swim and a 5km run. About 100 athletes blew out the cobwebs and competed, and we all felt great - especially as the sea-breeze pushed us along in the water. On the Friday morning, the Aussie team all gathered at the Langley Novotel Hotel for a sit-down team breakfast, with special guest Crowie - the newly crowned Ironman champion (again!), after which we all descended into transition to have a team photo amongst the 1000-odd school kids doing their thing. On Saturday most of us descended on transition after racking our bikes to hear the race briefing. Mel had conscripted Stewie Durham to fix a Garmin failure and was supervising the repairs. Would wetsuits be disallowed? No - it was a wetsuit swim, much to the joy of almost everyone assembled in the tent. Then the ITU drafting rules were explained, demonstrated and illustrated. The required gap had increased to 11 metres and we all thought that the penalty box would overflow. Then it was home to put the feet up and relax.

During the night the wind picked up, and so did my heart rate. My spindly little legs that had been cramping badly for 5 months in the pool weren't going to like having to push into a 28knot easterly. A quick breakfast and off to transition to settle the nerves. With the race preparation over it was time to clear transition and descend on the start line. We watched the Elites take off, their strong kicking sending up a long plume of spray whipped up by the Easterly. We all corralled into the pre-start pen like lambs to slaughter - and then it was our turn. As we descended down the steps, some Americans spotted a large jellyfish in the water. "Stay clear of that you guys - they're deadly!" I yelled, and we all laughed as they jumped sideways. That was my "gotcha" for their cheating at the Olympic distance worlds in Vancouver last year. Score settled.

After what seemed like an age, we were off, pounding through the chop, the jellies and the leaves. The course went up to Heirrisson Island which seemed to take for ever, then finally a turn out of the wind and back to the finish. I walked out some cramps getting encouragement from Yvonne Rash at the steps, only to get "old bugger" abuse from Pete Rash as he sprinted up the steps past me to snatch 18th out of the water in our age group. Thoughts of catching him and returning the compliment disappeared as the cramps persisted in T1.

Then it was off on the bike course, past the Bowman clothing recycling depot and onto the downwind leg. Was that Captain Marvel I saw in the bidon exchange area? That could only have been Clayton. I passed a number of bikes heading out to UWA as I settled into a 45kph rhythm working my cramps out (which eventually took 2 laps). Then shortly after the turn into the wind, I resigned myself to being happy that I could manage 30kph into the wind, and then watched as progressively all those I had passed earlier gradually passed me. The bike course was made easier with the cheering from the Aussies including people like PJ who was stationed at the Mill Point Rod off-ramp as a road marshal, whose strict instructions were to direct the defectors such as Ric Bond (Pommie B.....) off the freeway. PJ obviously forgot these instructions as Ric flashed past me later in the day on the run.

Then at last, T2 came and went and it was onto the road for the run. This was where I could catch up to Pete and return the compliments he dished out to me at the end of the swim. But the legs just wouldn't work. All the training at being able to run a lap in 20-22 minutes consistently even after a hard Saturday morning 120km session on the bike was quickly overshadowed by pain, and my laps went from 25 minutes to 33 minutes. I saw Sally Scaffs racing past looking strong and wished I looked half as good. There a number of Freo members on the course as marshals and spectators, all of whom such as Wes did a great job abusing and encouraging us - good effort to you all.

And finally, the moment we all savour where the pain seems to melt away - the chance to run down the finish chute in stead of having to run past for yet another lap of pain.

It was a hard day at the office. Thanks to everyone for coming and helping, cheering and supporting as it made the day far more enjoyable than it would have otherwise been. And I finally caught up with Pete Rash in the recovery tent and returned the compliment!

Happy racing everyone!