

HardTales in the Wild

It's the Little Things that Matt-err - October 2003

The last few weeks, with the exception of being hunted by a bear, have been very good to me. Solid training sessions, plenty of rest and healthy eating, all at altitude, has resulted in noticeable improvements in all three triathlon disciplines.

Last week I entered a little running race, it's name was a mouthful, to gauge my speed. The race, 'The North American Road Runners Club 2003 Offroad Half Marathon Championships' (I warned you) offered 5k, 10k and Half Marathon distances. I entered the 10k and set off at a reasonable clip. There were no distance markers, so a negative split was hard to measure. I managed to win my age group though, and was less than three minutes off the winning time (13 spots ahead) on a very hilly course. (It covered part of the infamous Mt Talac on Lake Tahoe's south-western shore)

More heavy training followed and this past weekend I set off down the coast for one more triathlon before the Xterra Worlds on the 26th. It should have been a great litmus test on my preparation as it offered similar distances in the three disciplines. The race was about four and a half hours drive from where I had been staying, so the day before I made the trip to a friends' house at Santa Cruz, which was less than one and a half hours from the race start. That meant I could get a decent sleep, awesome. On top of that, I made sure I got a massage the day before I left. Speaking of which, for 1 hour it cost \$140! At that rate you would expect a happy ending, but all I got was a couple of greasy fingers shoved in my ears! Different!

At 6am I headed for the race. Arriving with a little time to spare, I decided to change to semi-slick tyres, as the course was mostly gravel roads and looked quite fast. I knew this the day before but couldn't be arsed changing the tyres while I had time! The thing with tubeless tyres though, is they tend to be difficult to inflate when you're in a hurry. For some reason the bead doesn't seal on the rim and the whole ordeal can be very frustrating!

After stuffing around for far too long I wheeled my bike into the transition area and looked down the hill at the lake. There were already dozens of competitors in the water warming up. "Are you racing the long course?" asked an official looking woman. "Yeah" I replied suspiciously. "Well, you'se a better hurrys up, cause they'se a already starded." she drawled! Looking back at the lake I realised that they weren't warming up, they were bloody well racing! With my wetsuit around my waste, I bolted back to the car for my goggles and swim cap and then charged toward the water. It was only about a 400m run from the transition area, but over sharp gravel! That's when I remembered the instructions at briefing, "Take shoes to the water for the run back to transition!"

By the time I hit the water (to the delight of the laughing crowd), dancing like a ballerina

across the rocks, the entire pack had rounded the first buoy and the leaders were approaching the second! It was a triangular course of 500m and had two laps. I gave it everything, maybe too much, but my gas emissions from over exertion kept my wetsuit nice and buoyant! I managed to pass the stragglers and even catch on to the back of the pack by the end of the second lap! The leaders were long gone though.

Jumping onto my bike I charged off into the hills and managed to work my way to the middle of the field. On one particularly nasty climb though, I began to cramp in the wrong place and horrified, realised that it had been nearly 24 hours since I last gave No. 2 his marching orders! Even people that don't race know you should ALWAYS drop the kids off at the pool BEFORE you turn up to an event! Puckering up like a Surry Hills Starlet, I squeezed my cheeks and tried not to think about it. At the end of the climb I reached for my Gatorade.....but NO, I had forgotten to put the bottles on my bike! I pressed on and at the halfway mark grabbed a water bottle from the aide station. Part way through my second lap I started to fade and reached for a carbo shot. DENIED! Feeling all three shirt pockets in quick succession, an image of carbo shots scattered on the ground at transition flashed through my mind. I was having a shocker!

Tipping the bike into a fast downhill lefthander, I heard an ominous hiss and then my front end washed out! A quick stab of my foot righted the bike and I pulled it to a halt. Reaching under the seat for my spare tube and tyre levers proved pointless though as an image of the said tube and levers whisked through my mind....they were in the boot of my rental car! My brilliant plan of changing tyres to go faster was costing me big time!

Help arrived courtesy of a fellow competitor who generously offered me his spares and even helped me fix the flat. I think he was scared I would break his levers and pump, I was in such a rage. When I hit transition for the run, I had clawed my way into eighth place and slipped effortlessly into my runners (they are normally a tight fit). I transitioned so quickly that I even managed to FORGET the carbo shots that I so badly needed and dashed off for the first of two 5k laps.

After about 2k's though, I started to develop hot spots on my feet. By the end of the first lap, the Hot Spots had grown into full blown blisters. It wasn't until then that I remembered my custom running inner soles..... snugly tucked into my other shoes! To make it worse, the standard inner soles from the shoes I was wearing....were in the boot of my car! I had started to change them when I decided swapping tyres was more important!!

I lumbered on, but it was getting hot. I know this, because in my haste I forgotten to put any sunscreen on as well! I'm not exactly a 'Bronzed Aussie' and my skin is more inclined to adopt a 'Boiled Lobster' complexion when exposed to too much sun light! Then, lucky for me, after a few days it blisters, then finally becomes itchy and peels. Whoo hoo! Right now I am positively glowing and can't wait for my skin to turn into bubble wrap!

I pressed on though (what else could I do) and salvaged 6th outright, from what could have been a much better day.

The morale to this one is;

'Make sure you do the little things right, especially on race day. They are just as important as the Big things!'

The other morale is'

'If you're having a bad day, it's probably your own stupid bloody fault!'

Keep it on two wheels

Angry Man

