

HardTales in the Wild

The Great Debate - December 2004

Ok, so it's an open ended question that can kill a friendship quicker than adultery, but I'll risk it ... the debate that is:

"Who is tougher, an Ironman Triathlete or an Adventure Racer?"

Before I dive head first into the shallow end, I'll throw some parameters into this debate before we kick start it.

- 1) Ironman is the pinnacle of Triathlon, so to be fair it has to go up against the pinnacle of Adventure Racing, which would have to be Expedition Racing
- 2) The Tour De France interests me, so I'll add it to the comparison

That's enough rules for one debate, so let's get started.

It's important to know that I have never competed in an Ironman Triathlon and I have never ridden in the Tour, so I am basically speaking out of my arse on each of these topics, but I reckon that qualifies me as an expert anyway.

a) Training;

IM - To compete (not participate, but actually have a real crack) at Ironman, you need to spend countless hours swimming, riding and running. You need to watch what you eat, manage your sleep and give up sex for a month before the event (not sure if the last point is true, but it fits the profile of all the triathletes I know).

TdF - For the Tour, I suppose you can ditch the swimming and running and then follow the guidelines for preparing for an Ironman.

AR - For an expedition, you need to paddle (oceans, rivers, rapids and lakes), mountain bike, kickboard, roller blade, horse ride, abseil, ascend, trek, run, swim, snorkel, navigate, sail, mountain climb, raft and rock climb every weekend for a year. You can eat what you want and shag anyone.

Verdict: I guess Triathletes are tougher here, but Adventure Racers have a hell of a lot more fun. The Tour boys draw the short stick for sure, I love my bike, but not that much.

b) The course;

IM - Ironman courses are marked and can be trained on 365 days a year. Soft bastards.

TdF - The Tour course is friggin' long, and has lots of hills, but very few surprises except maybe a stray cow or a spastic handbag wielding fan.

AR - Expeditions have no direct course, are thwart with danger and intrigue, offer unquantifiable difficulties and kick arse over marked courses.

Verdict: Adventure Racers win this category hands down, then the Tour boys and finally, Triathletes have nothing.

c) Endurance;

IM - 4km is a long way to swim, can't say I would want to do it, especially with sharks and jelly fish and all those other sea born bastards hunting me. 180km is a bloody long way to go on a bike as well, especially if you are on a boring arse road, hammering until your head explodes. 42km running the same road you just cycled, you can stick that too.

TdF - 3000km on a bike, now we're talking about a journey. At a speed above 40kmh though, elbow to elbow with a bunch of physco Frenchies maybe not.

AR - 450km to 750km, through the bush, across oceans and lakes, down rivers, over mountains and every where in between, that's an experience. Add poor nutrition, sleep deprivation and self sufficient navigation and the difficulty overtakes the excitement, sort of.

Verdict: The Tour is longer, but the slack bastards get to sleep each night and dine on a hot feed. Ironman distances are tough, but hardly rate on the ultra endurance charts. An expedition, thanks entirely to the fact that sleep is optional, snatches this category.

d) The pleasure;

IM - Personally I am still struggling to find the pleasure offered by an Ironman, except maybe finishing. Perhaps that's why I haven't done one yet. I suppose crowd support and atmosphere must offer up a buzz or two.

TdF - The Tour sights and sounds must be amazing. Each mountain pass has to offer the wildest views, but do they ever really get to stop and soak them up? The crowds again would be a high light.

AR - Only in an Expedition do you get to literally taste the sights and your environment. The fresh flow from a mountain stream, the brush of a stinging nettle, a wasp bite to the ear! The highs are very quickly followed by lows in AR, but have a think about what sticks in your mind after a race.

Verdict: Ironman has to win this, purely because it sucks arse and is boring. It takes one mean bastard to put up with that much pain for bugger all reward.

e) Team aspect;

IM - It takes a team to get you to an Ironman (masseur, coach/es, nutritionalist etc etc), but on the day it's all you. No points for going solo, it's the easy way out.

TdF - If your team don't rock, you will have a crappy Tour. Unfortunately for the team

though, all the reward goes to the lead rider, yet he is wrapped in cotton wool for a large part of the race. Kudos to the team, shame on the captain.

AR - Now we're talking teams. Stay together all race, 100m apart at most, help each other everywhere or risk losing one. No one gets the glory, it's a real team thing.

Verdict: AR wins again.

f) Chauvinists;

IM - All's fair in Ironman, except the prize money. Well done kids, fairy claps all around.

TdF - Still haven't seen a chick in the Tour, been looking too!

AR - Usually one skirt on offer, slagged off as being mandatory equipment though. Obviously the people slagging haven't raced with Freya!

Verdict: The Tour wins here. Must be bloody hard work going for 3 weeks without seeing a single fembot in lycra! Personally I think there is only one thing better than drafting a girl.

g) Nutrition;

IM - Race food consists of Power bars, gels, carbo drinks and the occasional can of flat, hot coke. Nasty!

TdF - Again, crappy bars, gels and the occasional coke. although at the end of each stage the boys chow down to a veritable smorgasbord designed to aid in recovery.

AR - More crappy bars, gels and the occasional coke, but the smart racers also suck down vegemite sangas, fruit, pizza, chocolates, chips and anything else they can stomach or bare to carry.

Verdict: Ironman has to win this. I can't think of anything worse than eating energy bars all day! Tough bastards.

h) Miscellaneous;

Triathletes are frowned upon if they have hairy legs, but in AR it's optional.

Triathletes train with discipline and a relatively low fun factor in comparison to AR.

AR is a team event so you always have people to share your pleasure and pain with.

Five star accommodation is achievable twice on the same day in IM, but unheard of in AR.

Triathletes often talk about having to 'Dig Deep' during an event. Wankers. I've never done an expedition where I didn't dig deep, but I don't go nancying to my friends about how I suffered and then recovered, because they were doing the same thing right next to me.

IM's top athletes are super fit, but so are AR's.

So where does this leave us? I suppose we can rule out the Tour after all because, despite using Teams, they don't let girls play and that's just wrong!

That leaves us Ironman and Expeditions. Unfortunately the jury is hung on 3 votes a piece. That means it's up to me to decide who is tougher, Triathletes or Adventure Racers.

I don't really have the kahunas to single out one as tougher than the other. But this I do know, if completing an IM is the most rewarding experience a triathlete can achieve in their sport, try multiplying it by 5 or 6 days and the guarantee of someone to share it with, that's where an expedition will take you the ultimate euphoria!

Angry Man

