

HardTales in the Wild

Done & Dusted - September 2003

There were two big events this weekend, so I'll jump straight into the first one.

Xterra Nevada, 750m swim, 32klm Mountain bike ride and 5klm trail run. Sounds moderate enough, right? Wrong!

The swim was in Lake Tahoe, which at this time of years is a chilly 50 degrees Fahrenheit (whatever that is). A sleeveless wetsuit is definitely not my best investment! Plunging into the brisk waters with 237 screaming Americans, all 'hootin and a hollerin', I aimed for the first buoy. It arrived more quickly than I anticipated, but I must remember to find and thank the prick that reached over and pulled my goggles down! Turning past the buoy I took a sight of the next. It didn't come quite as quickly as the first, but I was in a rhythm.

Breathing one every stroke (instead of the usual 3 strokes then puff) was a touch slower, but had more to do with the altitude than fitness. Rounding the final buoy and heading to the shore I surprisingly hadn't fatigued at all (although my shoulder still hurts two days later).

Dolphin diving the final 20m I glanced at my watch, 15:03, not a world record but 3 seconds off what I had predicted.

The 200 yard dash to transition turned out to be 600m on gravel road, with frozen feet! Ouch! Buckling my helmet on I looked across transition and figured about two thirds of the field were gone, at least. I slipped into my gloves as I rode out on the flat section and sucked on some Gatorade and steadied my breath for what lay ahead. 7klm of constant climb with 1600ft of elevation gain on a very sandy fire trail! Everyone else seemed to be in slow mo' as I spun my way up in the middle chain wheel. Having practiced definitely helped knowing when to spin and when to hammer. The Michelin Comp S Lights worked a treat at 33psi, thanks Rod.

At the top of the climb the Aid station told me I was in or around the top 45. AArrgh!

The next stage was another 7klm but this time single track. To the left was sheer wall and to the right a 300m drop! There was absolutely no room for error on this stage and supposedly no room to pass. By my 6th or 7th passing move, I was in the groove and feeling confident. I even sucked down a carbo shot and sipped my bottle at 18mph.

A short climb again and onto a few k's of wide firetrail for some more passing...but I didn't see anyone! I caught some guys by the end though. Settling into the next big climb I reeled in a bunch more but didn't get close enough to pass! Not good. Swinging into some rocky single track I got by most of them but still had one to go at the base of the last climb. Then my bike let out an ear piercing PING! Then PING PING PING!!!! No way! I have never broken a spoke in my life and my rear wheel had just let go of four! I shut it out of mind and steadied into the final climb. Grabbing a few more places then yeaha, 8,800 ft and the top of Marlettes

Peak. The swim had been at 6100ft and it was all down hill from here. The aid station said I was maybe in the top 35.

Huh?! Surely I had passed more than 10! Clicking up to the big chainwheel I aimed for the not too technical, but scary fast single track ahead. They had said there was no place to pass here, yeah right! Most guys got out of the way pretty quick as I yelled "On your Left", but a few didn't think they had to. I only needed to effect one Block Pass however. For those of you unfamiliar with a block pass, it's a motocross manoeuvre that is done in corners.

Step 1. Get really really close to the guy you want to pass as you approach the corner.

Step 2. Yell like crazy, it confuses them and they usually run wide.

Step 3. Forget that you own brakes

Step 4. Use the other persons wheels as your brakes. Make sure you take good aim and at the apex flick your bike sideways and just slide into them. Be sure to connect wheel on wheel or it'll be a T-Bone, and that's just Bad Charma!

Step 5. Don't look back, Ever!

At the final Aid station they said I was perhaps in the top 25.

AAArrggghh!! I stood up and smashed down on the pedals. 7klm of slippery sandy downhill.

But it was firetrail so there was a little room for error. Every person I passed said "F@#%ing hell!" as I screamed by. Glancing at my speedo, 38mph seemed pretty good on this section.

I had been clawing my way up at 3-6mph just an hour and a half before. It felt good, but I couldn't tell if the squirrely rear end was from the busted spokes or the sand, probably both.

Thanks to Disc Brakes, the wobbly wheel wasn't too big an issue.

Hitting transition like a whirlwind, I was out in around 25 seconds and as I clipped on my race number and ran for the exit, I couldn't see many bikes! I thought, Give it everything!

By about a k though I had started to cramp, and had absolutely no oxygen in my lungs. I slowed to a shuffle but still couldn't get any air in, no matter how hard I sucked!

Then I remembered Conrad Stoltz' advice, "Breathe Quickly". He should know too as he's the twice and reigning World Champion (by the way Quassy, he says hello and looks forward to catching up when we train in S.Africa next year).

By the halfway mark I felt better and strode out again. I gathered up one of the three spots that I had lost on the first part but couldn't catch the other two or anyone else.

Crossing the line felt great and I was totally spent. Rocky, the announcer called me over for a chat and told me I was third in my age group and in the top 20. The final results saw me in 14th outright. Happy days in the lead up to Maui. My bike split was the 9th quickest of the day.

On the podium all I could think about was getting my wheel fixed before the next race that started in about 11 hours! New spokes were wound on and the bike thrown into the car with

just enough time to make registration and briefing. I marked up my maps, checked my kit and climbed into the Corolla for some much needed sleep.

The alarm scared the shit out of me at 1:05am, and I jumped into the cold night air and slipped into my bike shorts. I already had thermals on, and at 25 degrees Fahrenheit (whatever that is) I figured they would come in handy for the next few hours. Pulling the Raceline's Torso out of the bed (I love my bike so much that I sleep with it now) I set it aside and fetched the wheels from the front seat. Setting the rear in place, something didn't feel right. It was as if the wheel had lost weight over night. Re-adjusting the beam of my Petzle Head Torch (Thanks Chris, the original batteries are still going strong), I noticed the cluster was there, but the locking sprocket and nut were not! Neither was the bloody axle! I searched the car in vein, but knew all along that they were back at the shop! Scouring transition for a spare wheel was a fruitless endeavour!

Race organisers said it would be fine to RUN the course. The bike stage was about 60km and had a seven hour cut off. That's been done, ok I thought, I can make it. The race Director and fellow Adventure Racer, Karen from Team Epinephrine (who placed eighth at Primal Quest with the help of two Aussies I might add) smiled and said "you can run it alright, but you have to take your bike on the bike stage. At least it's lighter now, Ha ha ha" ha bloody ha your self Karen! She was serious though. This is a women that broke her wrist before Primal Quest, cut the cast off for the race and is now back in plaster!

I lost all enthusiasm for the mission at that point and sulked back to the Corolla for a couple more hours sleep. It was over before it began. I still haven't gotten to put my new found paddling skills to use in a race. Sorry Matt, I might need a refresher when I get home! Still looking for accommodation. I've had a couple of offers, one way over on the west coast and one in Reno. But I am here for the altitude and training! Focus! Stay in the car! (I miss my massage therapist so much right now! Christina, if you want a holiday, my back is killing me.) Reno is about 45minutes away and will definitely get a few visits on the weekends though ;o) Hope you are all healthy and happy

Angry Man

