

HardTales in the Wild

Everybody Hurts - April 2005

'sometimes...everybody cries. You know everything will be alright, but everybody hurts.' The sand was definitely deeper and the hills suddenly longer. It was 4am and I was sprinting out my 13th lap. A rooster crowed relentlessly as he had for nearly two hours and in the last couple of laps disaster had struck. A crash, two flat tyres and a dead battery on my bar light, made worse by a faulty wire on my head light had slowed lap times to 50 minutes. I feared loosing our grip on the lead and to make it worse, bloody REM were on repeat in my head. Typically, I didn't know the words, just parts of the chorus, so the song gave me the shits even more!

Endurance racing is where I'm happiest, but sometimes it hurts so bad that crying is a real possibility and stopping is all I can think about. 'Sprint Endurance Racing' is the worst! After Pa Egg booted me off team 'Hardtale Aged Care' for the final AROC Sprint, Hugh and I had entered the Sydney 24 hour mountain bike race as a team of two. A team of two is not as hard as going solo, but at least going solo allows you the chance to develop some sort of rhythm and once in the zone, be at peace with your suffering. With a partner however, the relentless relaying of the baton turns each session into a sprint as though it was your last lap!

"I'll wear a monitor to keep my heart rate under 145bpm, that way I'll be able to sustain a sensible speed all event" I stated as we prepared bikes and equipment. "I'm gonna wear mine just to see what happens out there." came Hugh's understated reply, which I translated to mean 'we're racing buddy, so brace yourself'! He had commented earlier in the week that it was just a training hit out, but if we were a chance of a podium at the end, then we would get serious.....yeah right! I could see the horns protruding from his forehead as the beast emerged from its slumber. My unassuming mate is as ferocious a competitor as any!

3 months ago I was fit. Preparing for the Jindabyne Multisport, I was riding, running and paddling hard, but as soon as I entered the water for the Australian Crawl, my shoulder blew and it was game over. I've struggled with it since and been off the bike as a result. Even running has ended in grief with a split AC joint sending excruciating tremors through my back, neck and arm. If asked whether I was ready for the 24hour MTB, anything other than an emphatic NO would lead to Pinocchio syndrome. So hoping that my shoulder would hold out, I knew that the suffering would jolt me back to reality. Endurance events hurt even when you are fit, so being unfit makes them exceptionally painful.

The first three laps were Hugh's and true to form, the bastard rode with the front runners! Still holding 10th outright as he passed the baton, he'd been battling riders who had 5 team mates backing them up. 'Keep it steady' I said to myself approaching the first pinch, deep sand and riddled with walking riders. Weaving between them I spun over the crest, looked at the monitor and shrieked! 193bpm! 'Back it off you bloody Galah!' But no, for half the lap I spun furiously, the whole time telling myself to back it off while instinct took hold and race mode dictated. Entering the back section, commonsense finally won over. 'Matt you dickhead, you've got 2 and a half laps to go before changing over and then only a two lap wait for Hugh to swap back, SLOW DOWN!'

I reined it in after that and over the course of the next two laps added 2, then 4 minutes respectively and lowered the old dicky ticker to 150bpm. The rest of the laps were a consistent and comfortable pace. Hugh still thundered out astonishing times however, and it's a good thing he did. His first effort had us over 6 minutes up on 2nd place. My first effort left us 30 seconds down! Hugh again put time into our nearest rivals on his second outing, and as the sun set in the west, I finally started to hold my own. With the night wearing on, we extended the lead to nearly half an hour (the equivalent of one lap by Hugh), but we weren't even half way yet, so there was no time for complacency.

In the small hours is when you either establish yourself or fall by the wayside. Our main rivals were still in striking distance and both seasoned athletes. Graeme Ferris is a veteran of events like MSOQ and renowned for his tenacity. We were just as determined, but I was way under prepared. Flating out and then losing light had me panicked. The time keepers were still working, but the guys updating the score board had gone to bed. We had no idea of where our rivals were and any slip up could cost the win. Soaked in sweat and freezing I fumbled around our camp for replacement parts while Hugh and our support crew Sarah tried to get 30 minutes sleep (their first all night).

It's a vicious cycle, riding in a team of two. You come in from the course, park your bike, take your helmet and gloves off and place them with your bike so they can be recovered easily. Then you swap the bidden on your bike and adjust anything that needs it. The bike always has to be ready to go at a moments notice. Food is next and you stuff in as much as you can stomach. It's hard to eat when you're tired and unrested, but you force it in anyway. Then find something warm to put on before cooling down completely. Always ready to ride on command. Then, and only then, you either sit or lie down to conserve energy and rest. Then with 10 minutes remaining, up you get and warm up for the next dash.

Because lap times can vary dramatically for any number of reasons, it's best to err to the side of caution and presume your team mate will have their quickest lap yet. This means getting back out to the transition area with at least 5 minutes to spare, and waiting if they are late. Even if your team mate peels off three laps, the most rest you can plan for is about 40 minutes before propelling yourself over the unforgiving terrain as fast and efficiently as you can, one more time....

In the wash up, we needn't have worried. Our rivals were comfortably tucked up in bed for nearly 4 hours during the 'dead zone' and we put 7 laps into them! They came back hard in the morning and smacked out some very tidy lap times, reminding us that it could have gone either way. Our Min Min Lights and expedition training was the difference, and despite being unfit, muscle memory kicked me along nicely toward the finish. Hugh never once let up and we'll be running a tow line off him at the Arrow to keep him in check! I've already forgotten how much it sucked when REM wouldn't shut up, and am looking forward to the 24 hour Rogaine this weekend ;o)

Angry Man

