

HardTales in the Wild

Patience my friends, one step at a time

On the start line and we were still goofing off, oblivious to the teams around. We positioned our boats at the furthest point on the beach and took a few photos. Then the hooter sounded and I actually saw the lunacy of a race start as if from the outside looking in. You bastards are mad! Skis, kayaks and people plunged into the ocean in a frenzy of paddles and PFDs. The splashing was mayhem and as we jumped into our own craft, I was amazed that there were no major collisions!



After two unsuccessful years at the Mountain Designs Geoquest, the 2006 event meant a lot to team Hardtale.com.

In 2004, Ant was hit by a quad skull two weeks before the event and sat out the rest of the year with a broken back. Three of us turned up to the start but at the 17 hour mark we were reduced to two and it was all over.



In 2005, the squad was complete, but I had a nagging hip injury that dictated our pace, and when Hugh rolled his ankle late on the first day, it was curtains for HardTale.com once again.



This year, Emily wasn't racing due to excessive study commitments, Freya was an unlikely starter due to her focus on the World MTB 24 Hour Solo Champs and Hugh gave notice that he wanted to win, but planned to

do it with team Tronk! It was a shaky start indeed, but a date change opened up Freya's calendar, Ant declared himself 'enthusiastic' and HardTale co-founder Paul Barry decided to have one more run before the birth of his first child. With the squad decided, we just needed a bit of training to make the line, but my moving interstate the week before the race, Ant and Paul both taking extended holidays overseas and Frey competing back to back 24 hour MTB races meant that:

- a) we couldn't train together
- b) none of us really trained at all
- c) the expense, effort and energy of getting to another big event took its toll on all of our motivation levels.

So we all simply turned up on the Saturday morning, shook hands and said 'let's have some fun.'

10 minutes into the paddle and Paul and I decided to put skirts on as our boat was filling pretty quickly with water. We pumped her out and skirted up, only to find 10 minutes later that we were full again! The return valve on the newly fitted bilge pump was missing and the outlet became an inlet. Oh well, paddling with a boat full of water isn't so bad...is it? We persisted to the end and still managed to keep sight of the middle of the pack. The free waves to shore were perfect for a surf and I even considered paddling back out to catch a few more.

On foot now, we teamed up with Tangerine and Gear for a beautiful trail run along the coast and over some headlands. We invented new songs, harassed the teams around us and kept our heart rates in check. At the transition, we donned wetsuits, picked up tubes and headed for our kayaks. What a rude shock that creek was. It smacked of 'sewer outlet' and I was dreading the bite of a mutated bull shark! Crossing the Macleay River proved interesting as the current swept us toward Fiji instead of transition, but at least when we got there our boats were no longer full of water.

Jumping into the kayaks with Gear and Tangerine still beside us, my fat arse dropped to the hull and I looked down to see that the seat had broken off the deck. Doh! These super fast new boats needed some tweaking! Paddling lopsided with a busted piece of foam trying to penetrate my wetsuit wasn't that much fun, but the current helped the first few km's and Ant's rendition of the Lact-Away song kept us grinning. Onto the tubes again and it occurred to me that we were just about through the first stage and we still hadn't asked what position we were in, or in fact how far ahead the leaders were! Unheard of I say!

The 20 minute stop allowed for some quick showers and a change of clothes before the transport stage. It was great to get a feed during the transport, but a bit dodgy when we did three U-Turns on the Pacific Hwy before finding the next TA. Then the heavens really opened up and life turned to custard. My derailleur packed it in, leaving granny, middle and the big chainwheel, but no rear cluster. Towing team mates was now out of the question...how good is that! Then Paul asked if we could stop so that he could tighten his seat, only to find that the seatpost had snapped and there wasn't a spanner or nut in the world that could fix his 'loose' seat! An hour of friggin around with makeshift sticks, shims and sighs got us no closer and we began pushing our self-destructing bikes when the gradient picked up.

On to the rogaïne and Ant's magic compass placed us within spitting distance of all but one checkpoint, but we soon found it and were off onto the bikes again as the day came to a close and the broken record of home made songs wore thin. We pushed our steeds up that hike-a-bike to a new chorus of potty-mouthed competitors that all declared to give Craig a piece of their mind. Then I tore off down from the lookout with Freya while Ant's brakes ate themselves a new a@#ehole and forced us to walk all the way back up to him for urgent repairs. All told, we needed two sets of fingers to count the lost hours due to equipment failure, but still no-one complained. The race was gone, but the dawn brought new songs.

Into the split rogaïne and somehow there were only 8 teams listed as reaching the stage and 3 were still out there? 'Damn, this must be tough' I thought as Frey and Ant rode off while Paul and I looked helplessly at the photocopy of a map. In the drizzling rain however, our photocopy disintegrated and 3 hours later we sent Ant and Paul back out for a second look. The magic compass fell asleep and it was lunch time when we returned to HQ to commence the final stage.

We stripped bikes and bodies to the bone before applying the necessary bandaids to steel and skin. The Tiger Leeches shrivelled under the salt shaker and the support crew slaved tirelessly, all-the-while questioning our sanity...and their own. Adventure Racing starts after 24hours of sleep deprivation and we were having a ball!

Fearing the cut-off, we rode like demons to post the 3rd fastest bike split, despite our makeshift repairs. When a local manned the phone booth indefinitely however, Paul blew a vessel and over at the local pub Redgum belted out "I was only 19..... and what's this rash that comes and goes, Doctor can you tell me what it means? God help me, I need 3B cream!" My favourite song echoed on as we waited for the phone, live and unplugged by the real McCoy! "They must be in their 60's" Ant grinned, "Pauly kicked the phone booth, the day that man-

kind kicked the moon, God help him, his last race was in June."

Back on foot an hour or so later we headed for the high hills, but the magic compass told a white lie and we battled lantana for an hour on a parallel to the road. Then it found its bearings and some creeks and we were back to TA. It was cold and late again and morale dimmed with our lights. 'Note to self: pack more batteries.' Coming down the mountain my front end washed out at 45kmh and the back wheel swapped past me. I shat my dacks, reached for a tear off and kept her pinned. Paul shrieked "How the f#ck did you save that?" "Not sure mate, but I nearly tore my lips off kissing my arse goodbye!"

Falling asleep is a 48Hour specialty, so Freya and Paul were having a go. Ant and I chattered meaninglessly and sung even more ridiculous songs in an attempt to stave off the monsters. Dad's team transitioned beside us, but elected sleeping bags over spray skirts. The paddle was relaxed and our singing off key. The new super fast kayaks excelled in the portage and rice cakes never tasted better. We transitioned again before the second dawn and ran for home. The surf was up and we thanked Craig (I mean Angus) for starting the race two days earlier. The finish line arrived, someone said smile and the flash bulbs popped, or was it the sunrise?

47 hours and 15 minutes had passed and taken 22,458 of my calories with them. Despite all that time and energy, along with



6,245 metres of vertical ascent and ten teams between us and victory, we still felt like winners. Adventure Racings gives you so much more than it takes. Matt Dalziel summed it up at XPD 4 months earlier. "I've pulled out of races when I shouldn't have, and pressed on when I couldn't. I've won, lost, laughed and cried. It doesn't matter how you did this time, at least you bloody tried!"

Yes the fastest, smartest team won the race, but don't think for a second they are better than you. The start line is more important than the finish and each and every person that jumped into a kayak on Saturday morning rates a mention. I just hope that my next race is half as much fun! Special thanks to LineBreak Performance Wear, Mountain Designs, Hammer Nutrition, Min Min Lights and Lact-Away for making our journey that little bit easier. Sarah, Aaron, Kate and Sharon, thanks again for your fantastic support, we'll trade places next time.

Keep it on two wheels

Angry

