
I am a plodder, more tortoise than hare. Two previous IM distance races in 2002 and 2007 produced steady 13.19 (TLD) and 13.33 (IMDE) so no podium place for me. My goals for IM Austria were as follows – finish without doing myself serious damage (wife, kids, and kids dancing lessons to support,) achieve a PB, and go under 13 hours.

Getting there

We flew with Sleazyjet from Stansted to Ljubjana. At the easyjet check in it became immediately apparent by the large and varied collection of bike boxes that there were plenty of other fellow athletes on the same flight. Mrs M and I, once on board, could see the baggage being loaded and she spotted my steed and our two bags being put on. It soon became obvious however by the amount of head scratching and head shaking on the part of the baggage handlers that all was not well. The plane eventually landed in Ljubjana 1 and a quarter hours late and minus six bikes for which there had been no room.

Accommodation

We went with Nirvana Sports Travel, who we found to be helpful, reliable and efficient. Accommodation was rather basic but adequate. The downside was the location – about 10 miles from Klag and about 30 mins by coach. Alternatively it was 50 quid 1 way by taxi.!

Race Day

With about 20 minutes to go I made my way from transition to the STRANDBAD where I met Mrs M. As I was applying liberal amounts of sunscreen to Mrs M's shoulders I glanced to the right and saw we were being filmed by a Eurosport cameraman, much to Mrs M's embarrassment. However, while I may be crap at triathlon, I pack a mean punch when it comes to applying the old Ambre Solaire. My only inclusion in the race coverage might therefore be me massaging my wife's shoulders.

After the priest had said a prayer and I had said 200 of my own, I made me way down to the beach. "Slower to the left of the pier, quicker to the right" said the announcer. I joined the "lefties". As I shuffled past the grounded hot air balloon, I tried to ensure that my wetsuit didn't catch alight. I didn't want to make my second appearance on TV dashing into the water trying to douse the flames on a wetsuit inferno.

As I stood on the beach thinking "I should have gone to the loo one last time," "we will get the Pro,s into the water first" came the announcement. "We will get the rest of you in soon" (or words to that effect) said the announcer. As I stood arms folded, goggles in hand, a firework shot into the sky. "Ooo, that's nice" I thought to myself, before nearly being trampled by a stampede of neoprene. Blimey, we're off...run like hell...

The Swim

I dived into the water amongst a crowd of flailing arms and legs. It was carnage. Having eaten a hearty breakfast at 4am, 3 hours later I was consuming mouthfuls of elbows. As I searched around in vain for some clear water, I thought to myself, "I think I'm a goner..."

The pre-race collective wisdom was that the best sighting feature to reach the first buoy was a large structure on the hillside on the far side of the lake. On race morning it was shrouded in cloud. Just have to follow the trail of blood and fisticuffs in front then.

The pre-race collective wisdom for navigating back to the canal entrance was to use the large building to the left of the canal for sighting purposes. As the sun was now rising above the building in question, it meant that the building was now as easy to spot as an honest MP.

I was eventually hoisted out of the canal in 1.19, some 5 minutes slower than i had hoped for, but with my teeth and nadgers still attached to the rest of my body.

T1

Into the maelstrom of the changing tent I fought to get my cycling top over my wet body. In all of the chaos my sunglasses dropped to the floor and someone trod on them. One of the lenses dropped out. I made a pathetic attempt at getting the lens back in before a lovely Austrian girl came over offering "Can I help you fix?" "You beauty," I thought. Despite her being mooned at whilst I was struggling with my cycling shorts she eventually exclaimed "I fix!" "Oh I could kiss you," I thought to myself, but thought better of it – getting arrested for indecent exposure and sexual assault in T1 wouldn't look good on the old CV.

The Bike

The course was very scenic and in parts spectacular. About ten minutes into the bike bizzarely I was passed by someone wearing a thong. I successfully cycled the 112 miles without stopping, achieving a quadruple pee count- one of which went wrong and took out one of my colashots that was taped to my top tube. About 25 miles into the bike I spotted the leaders coming back in the opposite direction – climbing at the sort of pace I would be happy at going downhill. Bella

Bayliss [Comerford] looked worried that I was only 20 miles behind her. I finished the bike in 6.31 – I would have been a couple of hours quicker had i not been traumatised by the sight of the bloke in the thong.

The Run

Imagine someone aiming a Bunsen burner down your shorts, and microwaving your head – thats what the first part of the run felt like. It was hot!

Like most people, I walked through the aid stations. Unlike most people, I walked the bits between the aid stations as well. Well, not strictly true – I shuffled along for chunks at a time occasionally swapping words of encouragement with fellow Brits eg “This is a living hell.”

And then it happened. It started to rain. Oh joy of joys. I upped the pace from slug to snail. The crowds were very supportive and one old lady whose brain had obviously been frazzled by the baking sun blurted out, “super running Andrew.” “That’s a first for me” I thought to myself – my running has never been described as “super” before. I glanced over my shoulder to check that she hadn’t been dragged away by some men in white coats.

Back into Klag town centre for the last time. After jumping up and down a couple of times I rang the bell, hoping that excruciating cramp didn’t set in upon regaining contact with terra firma. At this point, following a quick self assessment, I concluded that the only part of me that didn’t hurt were my eyebrows.

As I headed for home I realised that sub 13 wasn’t to be. I could still get a PB though. As I ran down the finishing chute I could hear Mrs M shouting my name. The commentator said “Andrew Mayers von Gross Britanian... aged 42” (I thought it churlish at this stage to quibble that he had got my age wrong – it could have been worse I suppose – at least it wasn’t “Andrew Mayers von North Korea... aged 80.”)

I crossed the line in 13.15.34, a PB. Job done.
