

Ironman UK 70.3 17<sup>th</sup> June 2007 (Wimbleball). 1.2m swim, 56m bike, 13.1m run

It all started on a warm afternoon in Sherbourne, August 2006 as I watched Gary cross the finish in the full Ironman triathlon at Sherbourne and said to myself

“I must have a go at this”

Gary didn't let me forget these words and I soon found myself entered for the Ironman UK 70.3 at Wimbleball Lake, Exmoor the following year. With a Wedding to plan for as well I knew it would be a challenge (the race not the wedding).

Training started around Christmas. Most of the swim training was spent in the pool swimming in my wetsuit at Lough Uni as open water access is not easy in January. I knew my bike training was going to be tough; off I went though on long lonely rides, straight after work, with just jelly babies for company. Before I knew it I was up to 40+ miles at the weekends, usually head down and following Gary, no idea where I was but pedalling furiously. The run training was easy mixing in long runs with club sessions.

We arrived at Exmoor on the Friday before the race at 11.30pm after sitting in traffic for 6½ hours, in torrential rain (remember the storms?) and getting lost around the very hilly country lanes of Exmoor, not the best pre-race preparation as I sat in the car watching Gary put the tent up in the dark and pouring rain.

The next morning I couldn't wait to get out and have a practice swim in the lake. As we walked down to the water and saw all the yellow buoys positioned round the course I stood thinking

“Shit, that's a long way”.

1.2 mile laid out in a single lap looks awesome. In I went and swam the course well and began to feel confident for race day. Race day dawned, up at 4am after a sleepless night. Didn't fancy breakfast but thought I might be glad of it later, last minute checks on my bike, and I joined a lot of nervous looking people (myself included) climbing into wetsuits and preparing for the swim. We were lead down to the lakes edge feeling apprehensive but very excited, and I kept telling myself I had done the training so everything would be fine.

6.25am the claxon sounded for my wave start (land based start) and off we went running into the water all clambering for a space. It was very rough but soon got going into a rhythm; I exited the swim and was confident that I had recorded a decent time. Time: 39m.02s

Into “T1” shoes and helmet on, jumped on my bike and off I went, not bad I thought, everything going ok, took me a few miles to get my land legs working properly felt ok, UNTIL I HIT THE HILLS!.....

Put it this way, Beacon Hill is a doddle, these were something else, and I felt I needed a rope to climb them not a bike, they where near vertical climbs and I fell off my bike twice trying to climb them because I just couldn't get the pedals to go round. During climbing I was frantically searching for another gear but not finding one, I had used them all up! All the previous races I had completed over the past 5 years were a doddle, this was hell. This is called Ironman for a reason I kept telling myself, those that do a full Ironman race must be insane.

In comparison down hills where great and very technical. There is one very sharp left hand turn where there had been a serious accident, the carnage at the bottom of this hill was horrific, bikes in the hedges mangled metal everywhere with the ambulances picking up the pieces-literally. I made a mental note to take it easier down here on lap 2; I needed to take my children to school in the morning!! Bike time: 4h.19m

56 miles later, (it was actually 59 by my and Gary's speedo's) I rode into transition, feeling ok; and knew that I had a hard task ahead. My bike was snatched from me for racking, running

shoes on, and away I went feeling very very sick. I had begun to feel nauseous, I tried to ignore it as I started my 13.1 mile run, but in the first mile I was sick several times, didn't need that breakfast after all! To make matters worse Gary overtook me at this point on his last lap.

I really did feel very ill; I started my very own interval session. I ran until I was sick walked until I had recovered a bit then started it again. This was more or less the pattern for the whole of the run. At 8 miles I lost the plot, and I honestly thought that was it, but I kept thinking of the finish line and how far I had come, somehow I slogged on, saw the 12 mile marker ahead before I knew it the finish was in front of me. I was in tears as I caught sight of Gary at the finish line, I had done it, and I had the medal to prove it, a truly awesome experience which took me 7hrs 56mins to complete. I threatened to ebay my bike and wetsuit, and chanted never again several times as Gary looked on amused not believing a word of it as I had my tantrum.

On the long drive home I had plenty of time to reflect on my day, and slowly thoughts of the next one filled my mind. I tried to shut them out but couldn't, I think I'm hooked. It's true, Ironman is an addiction. Big thanks go to my husband for all his support and patience during my training, and my 2 sons who spent endless hours watching me swim up and down a swimming pool. Summed up by their words on Monday evening,

"Does that mean we don't have to go to the swimming pool again mum?"

Not for a bit I replied. I have just entered a full Ironman; I am doing Austria July 2008 with Gary so I guess it all starts again soon.

Jennie Harrison.