



This was Leg 1 of the Half Ironman Tour of the UK that I have decided to do in 2008. Set against a truly glorious backdrop of Lake Bala and the hills and mountains of North Wales the course was a tough one. Due to road subsidence on the latter part of the bike leg, the course was changed for this year; you would ride the first 25.1 miles and then turn around and go back the way you came. Sounds straightforward enough but the first 25 miles include a rather large mountain so this year you would get the pleasure of going over it twice.

I arrived very late the day before 23:30 the day before . I had to work!!! This is some 5 miles from the race start and Bala town centre. A work colleague who is also doing the Tour with me had set the tent up for me. So all I had to do was arrive and find him. Found the tent ok but took me a while to wake him up.

Next morning we were up bright and early and after breakfast we headed to the start area to get everything ready. I had to build his bike and I'm glad to report that In actually managed to bring a complete bike with him! We were set up in good time and had an opportunity to soak up the atmosphere as the sun rose and it started to get warm. Very warm.

I was in Wave 1 and at 0930 the hooter went to get the race underway. Mick was in Wave 2 and 10 minutes later he was off. Starting at my usual position towards the rear of the pack I quickly found clear water. It seemed that the pack split and either went towards the bank or towards the buoys leaving plenty of space in the middle that I took full advantage of. Not that this makes much difference to me. I got into a nice rhythm but, Learnt my 1st lesson of the day here(many more to come). Buy some tinted goggles cause as I turned at the half way point I could not see where I was going as the glare of the morning sun was blinding.

Out of the water in 41 minutes and into a way too fast T1(2ND Lesson of the day). Wetsuit came off easily (a first!) and I kitted myself out and off onto the bike. The first hill out of Bala is steep but it then flattens down a bit and you can get into a good rhythm spinning away. There were a few descents in the first few miles but these were fairly short and the general thrust was uphill. It was quite warm now and I was getting the first thoughts that the TT bike with a was perhaps not the wisest choice of weapon. The first major descent launches you down a 10% hill, something that training in Ireland prepares you for. I approached it cautiously and hit 55kmh but others were

going much faster, however, there were several other opportunities to practice fast descents and my confidence grew and I was soon descending quicker than most of those around me and the Fort proved a super stable companion at the 60-65kmh speeds that we were regularly experiencing. 7 miles from the turnaround point you turn left and the route is then very fast, mainly downhill, from this point to the turnaround and I was tucked on the tribars for most of this, making up a number of places. The downside to this speed, though, is that you then turn around and have to go back up! The 7 miles of almost continuous uphill was sucking the life out of my legs, and I knew I still had that 10% monster to come. The next hour was spent going uphill with only the occasional downhill to provide temporary relief. The 10% bit saw me crawling up at about 9-10 kmh Amazingly I made it to the top without stopping (looking back, if I had stopped I would never have got going again) and the downhill sections that followed allowed some sort of recovery. But this is where I learnt my 2nd Lesson because my family had come down to cheer me on and were supporting me in T1 I forgot my food so survived on 2 gels that I had taped to my bike. Oh my GOD. This is where my race started to go wrong. I came out of swim 190th out of 400. Was 78th out of 400 on bike so had made up 112 places on the 53 mile bike course on 2 gels. Mmmmmmm

Into T2 and it was now baking hot. I slipped into my trainers and headed off at a very easy pace, stopping at the first feed station to grab some water and High-5. I reached the 3 mile point in 23 minutes and was feeling OK; 4 miles passed in 33 minutes at which point it all went Pete Tong, my heart sank. Round a corner and the road headed for the heavens and it would be like that all the way to the turnaround point! Oh poo! I gritted my teeth and with a combination of shuffling and power walking headed skywards. The wheels were well and truly coming off the Reggie Wagon. I reached the turnaround point where people upon people upon people continued to go pass me. I'd hit the wall I had to stop wals, stop, walk, stop, walk for the next 7 miles this was the worst I had ever felt but was not going to give in. The sun was now pounding down on me which did not help at all. At the bottom the route seemed a lot bumpier than on the way out and I was really struggling – my tired legs and the heat were combining to make this a really hard race. With a mile or so to go I turned round and saw Mike making up the 10 minutes I had made on him. I was broken, gutted and ashamed of myself. Mike had caught me up with yards to go. He was graceful enough not to do me and ran in with me. As we approached the finish line my family was waiting and gave us a massive cheer and urged us on to the finish.

I finished in 5:34:21 and Mike was exactly 10 mins ahead in 5:24:21. Neither of us had covered ourselves in glory but we had both finished, unlike many who found the conditions on the day to be just too much. We went and dangled our legs in the Lake for a bit and then treated ourselves to an ice cream before heading home.

Splits:

Swim + T1 Bike + T2 Run Total Position Position In Age

Overall Age Group

Mick 40:13, 2:48:25, 1:55:43, 5:24:21, 160, 26

Reg 43:07, 2:41:03, 2:10:11, 5:34:21, 195, 46

That was the toughest race I have ever done and Bala 2008 now heads my list of

hardest races I have completed. But I also learned a few things along the way. The Fort is a damn quick bike, make sure I eat and Tinted goggles. Oh yes, and lose the extra half stone I'm still carrying around. .

The next leg of the HIM UK tour sees Mike and I racing in England; Me at the Trentham Big Half on 27 July and Mike at the CowMan on 6 July. The Trentham course should suit the Fort better and so I'm hoping to crack 5 hours for that one. I suppose I should do a bit of run training as well?