

Lanzarote Ironman 2009

Let's clear something up at the outset, we weren't being secretive (ok we were and will gratefully accept the 'silence' award) about participating in Lanzarote Ironman, we just didn't want to put ourselves under pressure to take part (ok I didn't want to), in case training didn't go according to plan – does it ever?

I always knew it was going to be somewhat of a blustery challenge but thankfully beforehand, I was blissfully unaware of the saying that in Lanzarote 'normal limits do not apply'. So now, somewhat weather beaten, older and hopefully wiser, here is Stephen's countdown to 'Race Day' and my countdown to 'Let's Just Make It to the Start Line and Participate Day'.

Outward Bound Saturday 16 May

We arrived at the airport with a mixture of nervous excitement (Stephen) and stress (me) and this basically set the scene for the rest of the week.

We queued anxiously at the check-in desk, casting our minds back to Larry's Training Camp report and waited with bated breath, like 2 boxers at weigh in, to see if we would make the weight. Thankfully no charges incurred (happy to give you some packing tips Bob) and we waved our bikes goodbye, praying that Stephen had wrapped them like a baby in cotton wool (well I knew his bike would be anyway).

Our holiday glee soon turned to stress when the bus driver shouted 'La Florida Apartments' and we bounced out of the bus (£20 lighter for the driver's privilege of putting our bikes onboard) and beheld the sight of the main access road dug into 15ft trenches for storm drainage. Every cycle therefore was to start with hauling the bikes up that road.

Start of the week

Sunday was spent building bikes and sun bathing. You can make your own assumptions as to who did what. Monday was somewhat of a baptism with fire as winds of 30+ mph hit - we only managed 26 miles. Stephen kept reassuring me (shouting) that it wouldn't be that bad on race day. In truth, he wondered how he would get round the bike course and would I even get near the bike cut off time. After a serious battering / character building in the wind and twice nearly blown off, we sat and pondered (stressed) over our race/participation tactics. We set off for an early evening short run down the promenade and were hit with heat of the day! Higher factor sun cream was purchased on the way back to the apartment.

Tuesday 19 May

We headed to the beach for the first practice swim to eye up the competition, and check that we still fitted into his and hers wetsuits. It was intimidating to see so many ripped bodies, male and female, but as the week went on and more people arrived on the island, we got speaking to lots of people who were in the same boat, which was the first time I relaxed since arriving.

After much persuasion and fear of what lurks beneath, I made it into the water, and we set off to swim one lap of the two lap course.

We exited the water after an hour and were a little perplexed (ok stressed) at how long it took us to do one lap, but Stephen, reassured me (shouted) that we swam well over the distance, and on race day I realised that he was right.

Remainder of Week

The rest of week involved getting buffeted by the relentless wind, intimidated by the elites sprinting up and down the promenade playing 'catch up' with each other. There was a huge increase in the amount of people and activity in Puerto Del Carmen and our excitement (stress) grew as the transition area started to take shape.

We became paranoid about keeping hydrated and so began the daily ritual / competition to see who was the most hydrated and who was dehydrated. Lovely!!

Day before the Race

Friday was spent getting our transition bags sorted, again and again and again, learning how to change a tube, visiting an osteopath (Mr C) who started out with just Stephen's appointment and ended up a cool £155 better off by treating 3 of us. Stephen reassured me that Mr C was a great investment, however when he left me alone with Mr C I started to wonder if he had left me with a quack. Thankfully when the time came for Mr C to work on my back, and I needed to remove clothing, Stephen appeared back. Mr C I must say was a complete gentleman and I needn't have worried.

We wheeled our bikes down to transition area and took in the sights of all the bikes already racked thinking to ourselves, we need new bikes to go quicker!! I could hardly fathom that the race was the next day and felt physically sick at the prospect.

Race Day

The alarm went off at 4.30am although we needn't have set the alarm as we didn't sleep. We both struggled to get our breakfast in and keep it down. We walked down to transition with a guy from our apartments who was also racing. David the Great Dane was in his special place/ zone from the moment he left the apartment (ear plugs in the whole time). We however were not. Just as we were within a few hundred metres of transition we realised that Stephen, sorry 'someone' had forgotten to lift the feed bags from the fridge.

Stephen sprinted back up to the apartment (sure he needed a warm up anyway) and I laboured onto transition with all the bags and drinks. No assistance from David the Great Dane 'I'm already in my zone'.

Swim

After both 'doing a Bryce' on the beach we said adios as I anticipated the starting horn and the mass sprint for the water. Stephen had previously reassured me (shouted) that I would be ok in

the thick of it, but I decided to go walk down to the water with the sensible ones, go wide and not get caught up in what can only be described as carnage when approx 1300 entered the water.

When I exited the water after the first lap and a relatively stress free swim, and heard the roar of the crowds, I realised that I was in it to enjoy it.

We were both happy with our swim times, and each raced our own race, even though Stephen did offer to stay together through the race (ok one lame remark that he would stay with me throughout the race if I wanted.....) but I thought it too much of a risk and didn't want him to slow me down – think I might have got that part back to front.

So after a run under the shower and a run up the beach we entered T1 in our own times. It seems that chivalry is not dead as one of the official helpers asked me my race number and promptly produced my bike bag. Stephen on the other hand was told that under no circumstances could anyone else lift his bag so he had to dive in and get it himself.

I got slicked up with sun tan lotion (apparently that is the most requested job for all the official helpers), got my bike and set off.

We had driven the bike route in the days leading up to the race, and so had a fair idea of what to expect.

Bike

The bike course was hilly, windy and lest I forget - long! After 35k Stephen's aero bar came loose and he wondered should he be a hero and carry on. I wonder was it properly tightened in the first place as I recall the same sort of sabotage, I mean scenario, when I had a water bottle bracket incident, attached by Stephen, at the Hell of the West. Sense prevailed and he stopped to adjust it. At 55k, it seemed that Mr C may indeed have been a quack (seriously he wasn't) as Stephen's back was in a bad way. The last 35k was pure torture due to the pain in his hip and he couldn't turn the pedals. This wasn't helped by the 175k mark being way off the true distance. That last '5k' was long and soul destroying!!

The bike course was certainly challenging to say the least and was the discipline that I had stressed over the most. That said, the course was enjoyable despite hurling on the bike and the lack of toilets around the route. When I could take no more I eventually stopped, jumped over a wall that just wasn't high enough to cover my dignity, and did what I had to do.

When I got to T2 Stephen was well into his run and I was grateful to have gotten around in one piece.

Run

In T2 Stephen asked where the male changing area was and was told 'you're standing in it'. He promptly dropped his shorts. I didn't even ask if there was a female changing area (apparently there was if you could find it), although I did wonder when I sat down to take off my cycling shorts (tri suit already underneath) why the man beside me was apologising to me. I soon realised why he was apologising as it turned out that he didn't already have his tri suit under his cycling shorts.

Meanwhile back on Stephen's run, he wondered about team Murray, apparently feeling guilty for leaving me on the beach, but satisfied with himself that he had just offered the minimum number of times to stay with me. It was a relief (only that he was off the hook) when he saw the pink hat and pink bar tape, pink gloves and pink glasses (it's not about how good you are but how good you look) come around the corner while he was running.

Stephen settled into a pace that felt comfortable and just aimed to keep putting one foot in front of the other, alternating drinks through each aid station (fresh oranges have never tasted so good). His mind started to drift on the last lap and then he caught himself on as there was still one full lap to go and anything could happen. When he reached the top of the hill and saw the clock he realised he had done it and had a tear in his eye. Little did he know then that he would be reduced to tears again when he had a further 10k to power walk with me.

So my run didn't go as well as Stephen's did. The dull pain in my shoulder throughout the bike turned out to be 2nd degree burns and I suffered badly from sunstroke on the run. I ran 2 laps of the 4 lap course and power walked/hurled the rest.

I managed a glory run down the last section to the finish line to the sound of 'Ladies and Gentlemen we have another Ironmaiden, all the way from Northern Ireland'. It felt great.

Apparently there were all sorts of lovely foodstuffs at the end of the race, although when I finished there was only cold soup. We went for a pizza and it was good to get real food into the body. I told Stephen that I would have loved a bowl of paella and that I didn't see any. His response was – you should've finished earlier.

Day after the Day Before

After the thrill of finishing had settled in, we both had a little difficulty walking downstairs. That pain was soon replaced by the burning sensation in my shoulder. Stephen's comments on the sunburn – you should've finished earlier.

Homeward Bound

The 2 weeks came to an end all too quickly, despite much of the second week being spent attending hospital. Before we knew it we were back at the airport, balancing the weight of our luggage around all the bags and seeing who was wearing an Ironman finisher wrist band. We spotted a german guy with big box sneering at our bike bags. His cards are marked for next year!

So it's all over. It was a fantastic experience, superbly organised and we have the t shirt (and scars) to show for the race.

Good luck to all you future Ironmen and Ironmaidens (and veterans), and enjoy the race as it will be over before you realise it.

Pack light, stay hydrated, have fun and enjoy the experience.