



MY IRONMAN EXPERIENCE

MARK KOMARNYCKI

3.8km swim, 180.2km ride, 42.2km run - in summary - PAIN!

Why? This is the question I've been asked so many times. I guess I could rattle off 101 clichéd quotes but I'll refrain. To me, Ironman is the pinnacle of triathlon. The ultimate challenge. You could argue that it is the toughest single day duration endurance event in the world. So what better way to challenge yourself. There's no doubt that you are tested both physically and mentally throughout the course of the day. You hit highs and lows and it is the mental toughness that keeps you going. Any time I watch past Hawaii races (Hawaii Ironman is the ULTIMATE race) I get chills and the raw emotion is unbelievable. The positive energy from the triathlon community in general is awesome. Most competitors get up before 5.30am day in day out in preparation for the event, the commitment and attitude is uplifting. It is surrounding yourself with positive people, there's no negativity to speak of.

The road to Forster 2005

Unbeknownst to me at the time, the quest all started back in Feb 2004 when after competing in sprint distance races for 4 or so years, together with a few training buddies, we had a crack at an Olympic distance race (1.5km swim, 40km bike, 10km run.). At the time, it seemed like a daunting prospect. A few days after the race, sitting down over a few quiet beers, surprised at how well we went, we decided the next challenge was a half ironman (HIM), the ironman distance x 0.5. We eyed off a race in November 2004 at Shepparton and started the 18 week training toward the start of July.

The training went well, only 12 – 15 hours per week at the time (seemed like a truckload back then) was manageable. My goal of completing a HIM was on track and looking back, I had absolutely no intention of doing a full IM. Leading up to the race, all things went to plan for me and I had a good first up race and came in with a time of 5h 9m. My training partner (Julian) pulled out at the 60km mark of the bike with hypothermia and ended up in an ambulance, this proved to be crucial! Not satisfied and extremely disappointed at not having finished, he decided to head up to Canberra 4 weeks later for a HIM and this time, he had a great race and unexpectedly qualified for the full Ironman in Forster. So here we both were after all this training and doing so well at the HIM that we realised that completing a full IM might not just be a dream after all. So after 18 weeks training together, he insisted that I head across to Tassie in January for another HIM and a crack at qualifying for Ironman Oz 2005 because he didn't want to face the training alone. Having a training partner really eases the training burden, especially the cold wet windy mornings when you have to get on the bike at 4:45am for a 90km ride before heading off to work.

Well, to cut an already long story short, got my spot and here I am. With an awesome coach on board (Mat Tippett), the quest began, 12 intense weeks to get ready for Forster on April 3rd. What

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can I say, I can't tell you how many times I recited "pain is weakness leaving the body" during the 12 weeks of training, from the 4km swim squad sessions, to the 150km rides in the hills, to the 25km+ runs in 30+deg heat, (at times the 25km run followed the 150km ride) to the sprint repeats up Anderson St hill at the Tan 35 times in one 90 minute session, mmm, nausea springs back to mind, as does divorce ☐ - only joking but balancing family with the training volume is a tough recipe!

There were times when I was ecstatic, miserable, aching (95% of the time), exhausted (up until 2 days before the race) and in pain (more often than not - pain is weakness leaving the body), that is where the support network around me, family – AWESOME!, coach, training buddies and club members (WSTC – Western Suburbs Tri Club) make the world of difference. The training is long, hard and uncompromising, starting at 15 – 20 hours per week and building to 30 hours 4 weeks out from race day. My coach sent this quote across very early in the piece - "Training is principally an act of faith. The athlete must believe in its efficacy; he must believe that through training he will become fitter and stronger; that by constant repetition of the same movements he will become more skillful and his muscles more relaxed...He must be a fanatic for hard work and enthusiastic enough to enjoy it." - Frank Stampfl from On Running, 1955

Forster 2005 - The Experience

Arrived on the Wednesday, nice and early, settled into our accommodation and went about race preparation leading up to Sunday. Lots to do!

Thu – Sat

Carbo load in prep for Sunday, eat, eat, eat. Consume 6 days worth of carbohydrates in 3 days without guilt, gold!

Friday Night – Carbo Load Party

Gluttony and lots of it, 1600 athlete's demolishing anything resembling food for 2 hours without a drop of alcohol in site.

Saturday

Rest, rest, rest, stay out of sun, feet up, afternoon nap, turn selfish (even more so – it's all about me now, although my wife says its been all about me since before Shepparton – will have to make it up to her later)

Sunday – Race Day

Up at 3:30am, more eating, starting to feel sick by now, will burn up to 12,500 calories during the race. Leave for the race at 4:10am, try and relax, stay calm, focus, skies clear, not a breath of wind, already 20 deg at 4:10am, it's going to be hot.

Arrive at the swim start, people everywhere, the customary queues at the porta loos are 10 deep per loo, nice odour! Wish training partner good luck, hugs from wife and kiddies and it is in the water for the 6:25am start.

Swim

1600 people starting at the same time all heading for the same point, CARNAGE, kicked in the head, punched in the nose, pushed under water for 15 seconds, but I give as good as I get and have a

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great swim, nice and relaxed, even managed some clear water for all of 5 minutes. Look at the watch at the swim exit, 1h 5m, game on! Great time for me and set me up for a sub 11 hour race.

T1 – Transition 1

Slow, 7m in the tent, nearly had time for a cup of tea I took that long. Took my caffeine supplements, sculled 750ml water and I'm away.

Bike

Things just went smoothly the entire bike leg, heart rate in check on the first lap, low 130's, drank 1200ml per hour, nutrition went well, carving people up down the hills getting up to 75km/hr, and in no time, the 1st 90km lap was over, heading back into Forster, yelled out to family and friends and I was away on the 2nd lap. Increased the heart rate to low 140's and had an uneventful 2nd 90km's. Feeling great, arrived back to start the marathon right on 6h 31m, ride time of 5h 18m, 34km/hr average. This is good, only need to run 4h for a 10h 30m race.

T2 – Transition 2

Reapply sunscreen, done the cap, fresh socks and runners and I'm away. Thankfully I'm much quicker this time around.

Run

Mmm, now 31 deg and it's hot! First 8km's of the run, on track for a 3h 30m marathon, ha ha ha. Pace starts to drop off, race strategy to walk every aid station to get adequate water works a treat, no cramping at all. First 21km's took 2h and hey a 4hr marathon seems possible. 22km to 30km – torture, mentally and physically, nothing a little caffeine can't fix, pop some more caffeine supplements and start taking on flat coke at every aid station, a resurgence! I run home in 4h 10m for a total time of 10h 45m 38s!

Finish

I get goose bumps from talking about the finish line. As I was nearing the end I saw my family and friends and I was absolutely ecstatic and feeling fantastic (maybe I could have gone harder). They were screaming their heads off and my wife was crying she was so ecstatic and proud. I ran over to them and got some hugs and kisses and then I was off to cross the finish line. I raised my hands in the air and ran down Ironman Alley (aka the finishing chute) – what an experience, walking and high fiveing the crowd, crossing the line, and then hearing voice of Ironman, Mike Riley announcing "Mark Komarnycki you are an Ironman" is truly an amazing experience, one of euphoria, one I have never experienced before, the feeling of achievement is remarkable. Already I can't wait to do it again.

Post Race

As soon as I crossed the line I was wrapped in a towel, presented with my finisher's medal and whisked away to be given so much wanted real food. Then after a quick massage I left the finishing tent to catch-up with family, friends, coach and club members for a chat and congrats, it is an experience that I wouldn't miss for the world.

Monday Night – Awards Party

Gluttony and lots of it, 1600 athlete's demolishing anything resembling food for 2 hours together with gallons of alcohol, partners relieved that they may now get some normality back with respect to family life. But I managed to pre-qualify for Ironman 2006 so the journey begins again.

Bring on Ironman Port Macquarie 2006!

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