



## **RACE REPORT**

### **Zoe England Ironman Geelong 70.3**

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7th February 2010; the date for my 13<sup>th</sup> triathlon and my first attempt at the Half Ironman distance; it was a day that delivered on many levels.

#### **Brief history:**

Twelve months prior I had not yet completed a sprint distance triathlon, I had done a handful of enticer tri's and was not overly convinced at that point that I would ever achieve a greater distance than 250/10/3. Anything longer just seemed out of reach, I knew I wanted it I just had no idea how to get there. Chance played a hand and I was made aware of this coach "Out West" who was helping someone I knew. I went to a WSTC tri at Altona and met Mat, while I was put-off by the fact that he did not seem to wash his bike...ever (I keep my bike very clean, now the bike washing may be in avoidance of housework, but she is still spotless) I spoke to some people, looked at the program and decided to e-mail him. I outlined my crippling lack of any athletic ability or history with, well, any sport at all! And that I had these crazy notions of doing long distance events; we talked on the telephone and the communication was right. The ultimate back-of-the-pack girl signed-up with a coach on the other side of The Bay.

#### **To the race:**

#### **Race morning:**

I arrived nice and early to Geelong, I hate being late and in a flap because of it. I proceeded to transition; yep it's still big and still full of lovely shiny toys! I find my beloved bike and prepare my little spot. Pump tires, attach Garmin Gadget, install bottles, Check for the 40<sup>th</sup> time my visual markers for transition (Shepparton Tri Club tent, bright orange) and wipe the bike over so she shines... Then I go to see a friend with my trusty floor pump, say hello to a couple of people who seemed genuinely shocked to see me there (I smile to myself over this) and go back to the ETPA tent to begin the sunscreen and wetsuit application dances. I am then met by Gary (Pitman) who has been a great support to me during the training. Calling often to see how I am going and making me laugh when I needed it. Gary arrived with his three gorgeous children in tow, they are all dressed in yellow t-shirts, each with a letter on them... with some rearranging of kids they spell ZOE – How cool is that!

I wonder down to the swim start chatting to a friend, there are so many people, so much

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nervous energy, it is great and I am loving it.

#### Swim:

The "Mass Start" 1200 odd people in a relatively small space all itching to go in the same direction. I can feel the tension and see the fear on some faces yet I feel completely calm. I know that Mat has set me up to succeed; the program and conversations have progressively built my confidence. I'm excited but there is no fear, I am prepared, I have plan A, B, C, D and E if needed. I am ready to go. And go we did, I started in the back quarter of the field as I estimated my time to be 55 minutes. There is a little bumping and swimmers coming over the top of me but nothing bad and nothing I could not handle. I quickly find my little space and follow the feet (a great thing for me as I am VERY short sighted!) About 400 meters in I got a little zap on the arm from a jelly fish, that's ok it does not really hurt and anyway I had done jellies in training. We get out to the first buoy and around we go, and what do you know I'm not last! Onto the next mark and another jelly zap on the other arm, well at least I was now even. I keep swimming concentrating on my form and the feeling of being long and streamlined in the water. I had real trouble seeing the next buoy but I still had people to follow so this was no problem. Before I know it we are around the last buoy and on the way back to shore. I hop out of the swim smiling I really enjoyed it and came in well under time at 47 odd minutes.

#### Bike:

This was my one cause for concern, I was not entirely sure I would make bike cut-off but I had gained some time on the swim and I had been working hard on keeping my head straight and positive: I was backing myself and my training, plus my bike had fancy new racing tyres - And new "shoes" always make things better! I don my bike shoes, helmet and sunnies (yay I can finally see more than 3 feet ahead) and trot out to the road and ride off. The course gives you just enough time to clip-in (if like me you are challenged in the coordination department) before you hit a hill. I have never been good at hills so this course was always going to challenge me. I crest the hill to many cheers from the "Team Zoe" cheer squad. With the first "hill" done I realise that the course is not beyond me, I'll have to push but I will finish. From here the course heads off into the cyclocross section, through the gardens. I actually like this section of the ride at Geelong it keeps you thinking. However it is not a place one should choose to take a sip from the Jetstream I learn this by jabbing the straw into my lip while going over a rough section - second injury, I am bleeding a tiny bit, but conclude that I will most likely survive.

We pedal on and the fun continues, I am on the same course with 1000+ other people, all types fast and slow, along with some great athletes - so cool. Out on the first lap, just past the gardens I hear the familiar sound, vwoom-vwoom-vwoom ....disc wheels approaching. It is the leaders. For a split second I am riding "with" Craig Alexander et al - ACE! Soon after I am passed by Ben (Gardiner) who is looking strong as he fly's past. It is so much fun being out there with everyone, seeing people you know and strangers all having a go. The ride went well; I paced myself and followed the nutrition plan. At the second aid station I was to do my first ever bottle pickup on the move - It went off without a hitch and so did the

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filling of the Jetstream and having learnt my lesson there were no more Jetstream miscalculation injuries. Each lap felt just the same effort wise and I held close to the same time for each. The last lap came around I still felt good and actually pass a couple of people, I found this briefly disorientating as I don't pass people ever. I come back down the hill into transition and have the second celebrity signing for the day – Tim Berkel (who looked like he had time for a shower and a nap between him finishing the race and me coming into T2) nearly steps in front of my bike. We avoid a collision and I roll into T2 – I made it! YEAH.

Run:

I step into my running shoes, pop the banana flavoured gloop filled bottles in my pockets and think to myself: wow I have got here. I trot out of transition for my first ever run over 16k. I am so happy to be finally attempting a half marathon – yep still smiling, surely that is wrong at this point!

The plan for the run was simple – keep running, have a swig of gel just before an aid station and follow that with a drink of water, just like training. I was also advised that the last 10k would be hard, dark (no one can hear you scream...) and that I would need the coke at some point and once there I had to keep on it...

The run is quite tough in some ways, there is a lot of up and down the hardest bit for me was between aid stations 1 and 2. Out to station 1 you have the crowd and it is a great atmosphere so you suck your gut in and run! After that, the section after the ramp, along the road I found difficult, a slight raise and I had a hard time keeping my heart rate down, both to the aid station and back out – there was some walking. The upside is that this aid station had implemented a hose-down strategy - which rocked!

So I kept running, walking at the aid stations so I could drink and not just tip water down my front! And got into the run scene, there is a comradely on course and it helps. Before I know it I am making my way down a sharp hill to collect my first scrunchie – I have not thought scrunchies to be cool since the early 80's I have since changed my opinion of them, they are one of the finest accessories a girl can have (on a HIM course anyway). Now for two more laps. All I have to do is to keep going and remember "every step over 16k is a PB".

The final lap and I am stepping into the unknown, I knew it was going to be hard which in a strange way was comforting. And it did get hard, just past the Hose-down station I was starting to hurt, lose focus and walked again; I thought to myself nope we need a run here, I need a cunning plan and then I saw him - someone up the road, in a crazy ensemble and decided to make him "race nemesis" based solely on his outfit. I started reeling him in, passed him and made sure I stayed ahead of him. I then looked for the next mark and did the same it helped to keep my focus going.

At around 18k I really started to feel the day. My back hurt, my hip was really hurting, I had a choice; I could stop be a Princess and have a little cry or I could get-on-with-it; I am British, we don't do public emotion so I had to get-on-with-it . I did stop briefly, stretched

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and sorted myself out a bit, I looked at Garmin Gadget 18.1k, my longest ever run and enough time left on the clock – I was going to finish, there may have been a little happy dance at that point (heritage intact as no one saw it). I continue on down to the last aid station, which was being maned by a friend of mine Simone; a big hug and I ask for a ceremonial cup of coke, I hadn't felt the need to go with the coke at all but felt it should be consumed just once. The last couple of kilometres were great, so much support from the volunteers (mostly teenagers that did an amazing job all day) who were still maintaining energy even at this late stage. Just near the pool I am greeted by a lady I ran with for a while and her family, they waited to see me finish which was quite touching and sums up triathlon in many ways. Less than 1k to go, I suck my gut in and do my best impression of running, I'm greeted by "Team Zoe" cheers and total strangers encouraging me. Once past my cheer squad I spy another friend Stephen (Foster) who has come down to see the action he is running up in front of me yelling "pass on the left" and "drop him" he takes a picture of me "dropping" Craig Alexander on the run, I nearly trip over because I am laughing at Steve's antics and Crowie's bemused look. Around the corner and we are home, I did it! In the process I did ruin my season record by not coming last this time but it was worth it.

I am greeted by my friends to share the finish; they had a long day supporting too and it was great to share it with them. I got a lot of support from new and old friends in this campaign, training for it has improved me as a person more than anything else. Training with ETPA has been great, even though I am always the slowest (by a long way) in the group I am never made to feel that way – they are a great bunch of people.

The thank yous' non-ETPA Andrew Jones, good mate and always keeps my bike in perfect condition, Simone, Sue, Kieron and my brother Alex.

ETPA Gary (Pitman) who has become a great mate, Julie (Stevenson) who helped me by riding with me on my first "hell brick" and is a great mate too. And of course Mat who has put up with my strong willed sarcastic nature and helped me to get the best out of myself. Two years ago this was impossible, one year ago improbable, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February it was reality – and I loved every second of it.