

Members contributions and articles

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Ford, Ironman World Championship. 21 October 2006

It's a long way to Hawaii. My journey started 4 years ago without realising that it would be my eventual destination. I competed in Ironman Germany in 2002 with the sole intention of finishing an Ironman. With this done, 2 years later Lorraine wanted a crack at it so I did it again with her. Lorraine finished and decided that she had achieved her objective and would not do another. I had learned a lot in these 2 races and thought that if I could put a good race together, on the right day, I may be able to qualify for the World Championship. For those that do not already know, selection is made by awarding "slots" to various races throughout the World. Germany was awarded European Championship status for 2006. Germany also has a huge Ironman following so was awarded 120 slots - the most outside of North America. This, coupled with the fact that I was now a "young" boy again in my age group (M45-49) meant that it would be my best chance of getting a slot. Fate would also prove to be kind as the day before the race, the swim was declared non-wetsuit as the water temperature was above 24°C. As a strong swimmer this suited me. There were lots of groans and nail biting from the weaker swimmers. It would be the first time in Europe that this had happened for the Ironman distance.

I raced well and did manage to put a good race together. I hurt like I had never hurt before and came away with 7th place. As there were 10 slots in my age-group, I had gained automatic qualification without having to agonise through roll-back. (roll-back is when the slots are allocated to finishers, in this case, below 10th position because of either pre-qualifiers or the allocated athlete simply does not wish to go). Whilst I was delighted to shout out when my name was called, another part of me was saying "Don't put yourself through that again!" and "Can I afford it? Of course I can, how can I not?"

Hawaii is, after all, the birth-place of Triathlon and arguably the greatest endurance race in the world. The Ironman web-site describes its history dating back to 1978:
"During the awards ceremony for a Hawaii running race, a debate ensues among competitors about who is more fit -- swimmers, runners or other athletes. One of the participants, Navy Commander John Collins and his wife Judy, dream up a race to settle the argument. They propose combining three existing races together, to be completed in succession: the Waikiki Roughwater Swim (2.4 miles), the Around-Oahu Bike Race (112 miles, originally a two-day event) and the Honolulu Marathon (26.2 miles). Fifteen men participate in the initial event held on February 18, 1978; 12 complete the race, led by the first Ironman, Gordon Haller. His winning time: 11 hours, 46 minutes and 58 seconds".

This report is supposed to be about the Hawaii Ironman but I thought that I should mention the selection process and just what is involved. Many people try to get there and never qualify as I did. Others are lucky to get in on one of the 150 USA or 50 International 'lottery' slots at \$85 a pop. The other way is to buy your way in, by bidding on the 6 charity eBay slots at a starting bid of \$12,000. Many triathletes disagree with this, myself included - even if it is making money for charity. So it is that I found my way onto the start sheet.

There were only 3 months to recover and build up again for the 'big one'. I rested for 2 weeks and then started to increase the workload. It just wasn't happening. I just wanted to sleep. I rested another week or so and was able to do gentle training leading up to the Bala classic distance triathlon with 5 weeks to go before Hawaii. I had to do this one to meet the selection criteria for the Rhodes Island Games next year. It turned out to be a well organised race on a good course, however, I aggravated an old injury with about 3k to go on the run and had to brisk walk in to the finish to prevent any longer term injury that could have jeopardised the big race of the year.

With only a hand full of weeks to go I had a dodgy solius and didn't dare run on it but concentrated on getting the big miles in again on the bike. Just over three weeks to go and I got a head cold that eventually manifested it's self as a chesty cough. The Doctor said it would take 6 weeks to get over it fully and there was nothing he could do, Ironman or not. Not what I wanted to hear. As all you sportsmen and women will know the best relief from the symptoms of a cold are on the banned list so you just have

to live it out. Preparation was far from perfect and I was about to take part in the biggest event of my life, yes, Commonwealth Games included.

As I was saying. It's a long way to Hawaii. 15 hours flying time + the Manx flight of course. We arrived at Kona in darkness and were glad for our beds. Next morning I was due to go for a recce of the swim at Kailua Pier. I got on a coach at 07:05 and at 07:07 Big Island experienced a 6.7 Earth quake centred only 30km from us. At the time I was unaware what it was, only that I had been jolted as if the coach had gone down some pot-holes. If I had only been looking out the window I would have seen the power cables rocking and cars bouncing on the road. I felt cheated of something. There was fortunately very little structural damage and only minor injuries. The cycle course had some large boulders that had fallen onto it along with many smaller rocks. More excitingly there was a 6" crack across the road out towards the bike turnaround at Hawi. All this was sorted for race day. We were unable to get our swim because of the threat of a tsunami being generated. As it happened, all was well. We had to wait to find out which supermarkets were open to stock up. Having just landed we had no food. Eventually we found somewhere that was letting one customer in as one was leaving to control numbers in the store. Many shops had their goods strewn over the floors. US TV made a big issue of it all as you may imagine and were interviewing people and describing them as "Earthquake Survivors" even though there had been no fatalities. There may have been if the shops did not open. I was starving!

The time leading up to the race was filled with the usual course familiarisation, race briefing, bike racking and looking round the trade Expo at all the latest goodies. Race day was an early start. Up at 04:30 to get breakfast then out to the starting area for the ritual body marking. In Hawaii this is done with wood block prints giving a nice sharp number. No sun block is permitted prior to marking to avoid smudging. It is not all bad, as some nice young ladies then put it on for you. Most entered the water with plenty of time in hand to get a good position so I gave Lorraine a big kiss and said goodbye. I had a race plan that I had thought out well before the race so just wanted to get going. Apart from the nutrition that is key to a successful race, I also had to pace it right to get the finish that was so imperative. Because of the poor preparation I would swim hard as usual but ride conservatively knowing what was ahead (Heat and Humidity). At 06:45 the Pros were off to the sound of a canon. Fifteen minutes later it was our turn and the rest of the 1,700 field headed off.

The swim was one of the most hectic I have experienced. Normally I can get into clear water after about 3 minutes. After 10, I was still swimming on feet and having arms flung over my shoulder bringing me to a dead stop. I had had enough so decided to go sideways to find clear water. This worked and I was on my way proper. The water was beautifully warm and if I had had time I could have watched all the different coloured fish, urchins and anemones below me but I had a job to do. I exited the water in 1:04, about 5 mins down on what I had hoped but I later found that the Pros were down too because of the conditions. Somewhere in transition ex pat Darren Skillicorn must have passed me and I didn't see him until the first run leg up Alii Drive. Darren is a class act and would go sub 10 hours (9:56), truly amazing in the conditions. Only 15 days later Darren did the Sid Quirk half Marathon!

Remembering the Pros started 15 mins in front of us I caught Jess Draskau just leaving town on the bike. She would re pass me before the bike turnaround never to be seen again (10:04:34). I kept to my game plan and rode conservatively out through the lava fields. The heat was now building but it was bearable as there was always a breeze. I took on board plenty of gels and water at every 5 to 7 miles when the aid station came up. The water was in green Gatorade bottles, the same as the Coke! So I had to be careful not to tip Coke over my head. Drafting is illegal even among the Pros and was strictly enforced. If a rider came by you it was up to the passed rider to drop back 4 bike lengths and not re pass for 20 seconds. So as happened a couple of times to me that a bike came past and the rider then slowed down to take a drink you had to bite your lip. All these things helped in a way to keep me alert to what was otherwise a boring ride. The landscape was mostly lava fields of various stages of regeneration. Some of the most recent was from as late as the 1980s. Lava on the other side of the Island is still erupting and spewing into the sea and has been continuously for many years. At one stage on a very fast decent I lost concentration while overtaking and hit the cats eyes in the centre of the road. These cats eyes are not like ours that sink back into the road but stay rigid. It put a ding in my front rim that required that I expand the brake on the release lever to prevent it from catching the blocks. It must have been close to puncturing. I saw Lorraine and the rest of the Manx support crew out on one of the hottest bits. That was a good lift. Another lift was when we got a shower of rain. There was enough to have water thrown up off my tyres, bliss. Never thought I would be glad of rain on the bike.

Despite my race plan I faded towards the end of the bike and was glad to get off and stretch my back and take on more of my own prepared drink. I had put extra salts in my bottles, it seemed to work well. The bike was taken from me as I ran into the changing tent. No gear was allowed at the bike. Everything had to be done in the changing tent. I forgot to put Vaseline on my toes before putting my running shoes on but took the time to take them off again to prevent problems later on during the run.

This was a good move because it was survival out on the run. The heat out on Alii Drive was oppressive. With high humidity, the sweat was not able to evaporate as quickly and without plenty of water and ice would quickly lead to overheating. The water that was going over my head eventually found its way into my shoes so I squelched my way round the marathon. Even with the Vaseline my toes blistered. But I didn't lose any toe-nails this time! I put ice cubes in my hat at each aid station (approx 1 mile intervals) and by the time I got to the next, the ice was the size of peas.

The crowd and helpers were great and were obviously looking for a bit of feedback from us as they handed out what was on offer. I was trying to block out everything that wasn't involved in putting one foot in front of the other and although I wanted to communicate I struggled to find the energy necessary to do so. If they could have seen my eyes under my sunglasses, they would have been glazed. I could have stopped at any point on the run. For anyone that has done a marathon and knows the feeling on the last 10k, the whole run was like that. I was promising myself that I would walk when I got to Palani Avenue which I did, taking on more fluid and gel while I could get it all in my mouth. I wasn't much slower than the runners here as it was that steep but only for about 500m. I then had to get running again, ouch.

Thirteen miles was a real low point, thinking, oh no I've got to do that again. The Pros were also heading back the other way with the helicopters and motorcycles. I started drinking Coke. That helped and I got talking to another athlete, a Canadian. We kept each other going out from the Energy Lab. A message board had been erected at the top of this hill that was activated by the timing chip. Lorraine had thoughtfully compiled a message (something soppy). The sun by this time was fortunately sinking lower and it was slightly overcast. Out of the Energy Lab and the Coke must have kicked in because I would say that the run became more fluid. The blisters were stinging but I could start sensing an end to the punishment. A little further on and I could hear the garbled tones of Mike Riley on the PA greeting the finishers over the line. There is a cruel loop just before the end that brings you within yards of the finish without seeing it, only to head out of town a way before returning. The return is however very pleasant because you know that nothing can stop you finishing now and the medal is as good as around your neck. With about 400m to go I saw Lorraine and co. with the Manx flag which I grabbed and held aloft as I crossed the line with a big cheesy grin on my face. I had after all, done something that only 4 years ago could only have dreamed of. Oh – the finish time 11:25:38 but who cares.

Graham Stigant
6 November 2006

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With the London marathon only 6 weeks away and the Parish Walk not that far behind, you may need to have those aches, pains and niggles sorted out. Why not give Robbie Lambie a ring, he is qualified in sports and remedial massage and can arrange house visits if necessary. Tel: 842043 or 453954.

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## **TOUGH CHALLENGE 2006**

It was with trepidation that I walked round the course of the first ever 'Tough Challenge' in Wendover Woods, near Aylesbury in Hertfordshire, on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November.

I had arrived in nearby Tring the previous day, after a generous friend from Liverpool had driven me there. We met with the race organiser, Rory Coleman, at the hotel. He himself has run 500 marathons and 150 ultra's. I soon realised that his words, "this race will be tough", would ring true!

At 7.30 am on Sunday a frost lay on the ground and it was freezing! However it was dry and sunny and the trees in the woods were beautiful colours.

I registered and walked the one-mile course. First there was a muddy bank to negotiate and after was a muddy track, just one-person wide and covered in brambles. Then there was a steep descent down a slippery hill for 150 metres. At the bottom it levelled out on a stony path and then turned left and uphill. UPHILL! Yes, it was steep! Rory had said, "you may be able to run up it once, then you will have to walk it!" That was to be true. Even experienced runners walked up the 100-metre climb. The topsoil wore off as well, leaving slippery limestone beneath. Then there was a detour round a cone before a half-mile sloping climb up to the start / finish. I was to do 13.1 laps inside 6 hours. There were 46 of us running a 10k, half-marathon or marathon.

The claxon sounded a 9 am and I pulled into the lead, as, at that stage, nobody else knew the course. After 200 metres 2 men sprinted past and downhill. I took it easy, as I did not want to fall or injure myself.

The first 3 laps went okay – about 13 minutes each lap. Then my calf muscles began to burn and it was agony walking up the steep hill. We all encouraged each other. The camaraderie was brilliant as we were not out to race, only to challenge ourselves.

I ran / walked, chatting often to other struggling runners, and then I was on my final lap. Rory yelled "go for a PB!" "What on these legs!" I replied. Then I finished – 3 hours 12 minutes – not my fastest race but the euphoria was amazing. I had beaten the punishing course! I got my finisher's T-shirt and chatted to Rory about finishing our Parish Walk twice.

My quads are now in agony, 2 days later! But once recovered I will be in hard training. Rory sent me 2 ultra running manuals, as my next big race is Tring2Town, a 45 mile run / walk along the Grand Union Canal to London. I cannot wait for my first ultra, and for tough challenge 2. Mad? No, absolutely barking!!

Bethany Clague.



### **Chairman's Report 2006 as given at the Annual Presentation Dinner**

This year has been a very busy one for the club. Not only busy but also very successful. Initially it looked very daunting as we had committed ourselves to putting on the 100 mile walk in August, when we also had our Marathon. The success of both is a great tribute to all the hard working members who were involved. Huge obstacles appeared right from the start with the 100 mile event, not least being the amount of money needing to be raised, and finding a course which was acceptable for the competitors, and which could be covered by the needs of lighting, health and safety, feeding, and observing at all times that the walkers were walking correctly.

A lot of hard work was done by a small band of people in selecting the venue and bringing together so many marshals and helpers. Many doing more than one four hour stint. The event was a credit to the island and the standard set silenced any would-be critics from off-island. When so many people did so much it doesn't seem fair to single out any of them for the part they played, but I have nothing but admiration for the workload undertaken by Maureen Cox and Ray Pitts, who had such valuable help from his wife Glynnis. How proud we can all be of not only that committee, but also of our island walkers. 19 new Centurians I believe. The winner was Sean Hands and, but for such an outstanding walk by the Greek Cypriot John Constantinou, we would also have had the winner of the Starlight Stroll over 20 miles in Robbie Lambie, who is this year going through a purple patch and showing the kind of form that made him a Commonwealth Games competitor some years back.

The individual performances were so well documented in our newsletter by Maureen Cox in her excellent article that I feel I needn't add anything other than to say how much we were willing our secretary, Lesley Christian to complete the 100 miles, but she must have been gutted when after walking 96 miles she ran out of time. So near and yet so far – but I am sure she will one day become one of those much admired Centurians.

With regard to the Marathon, a measure of how well it was organised and enjoyed could be seen from the vast number of emails and letters which were sent from grateful competitors. Congratulations to

Christine Bathgate as race organiser for all her hard work in bringing everything together. I wish I knew how she has been able to manipulate the weather. It was a super day and many thanks to all of you who helped. One of the outstanding performances of the day came from Wendy Ross in winning the Manx Championship.

The future of running on the road depends largely on several things. Having enough people willing to give of their time to marshal, operate drinks stations and putting up and taking down the warning signs. Sponsorship is also a vital ingredient and we have been very fortunate to have Close Private Bank as our main sponsor for the past six years. We are very grateful to them for their support and look forward to working with our sponsor for 2007, David Salter of Salchem Ltd, in order to continue with the high standard we have tried to maintain in the past. Lastly, we need your co-operation as competitors to keep the roads safe and secure the future of road running events. Having delivered that message to the competitors just prior to the start of the recent Syd Quirk half-marathon, I was rather upset to see, along with Mike Gellion's excellent race report in the Manx Independent, a picture of Tony Okell running through the dip at Billown, along the white line in the middle of the road, with vehicles passing him on both sides. What more evidence is needed for motorists who think we are a danger on the roads? Perhaps it's time to warn at the start that in future we cannot accept this behaviour especially as we have more than a hundred runners or walkers on the course, and what if they all took a similar line? There would soon be no more running on open roads. It might yet need a disqualification to get the message home.

It's good to see that the high standard set in the past by club competitors has been maintained, with a third of the runners in the Veteran's road running shield showing better times than the standard for their ages. Once again a club member has won a medal at the European Masters Track and Field Championship in Poland, when Andy Fox gained a bronze in the Steeplechase.

Colin Watterson

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