

# SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

# MY A TO Z OF IRONMAN

ANY triathlete worth her or his salt will know that the Ironman is the ultimate – it's a test over a 3.8Km swim, 180Km bike and a marathon run.

More than that, it is a test of the athlete versus nature, the athlete versus the competition and most of all the athlete versus her or himself.

Four of my Club mates recently performed heroics in Southern Germany at two different races. Ian O'Kane (14.32) and his brother William (12.01) both completed Ironman Frankfurt.

Meanwhile Mervyn Kelly (14.17) and Alan McElhinney (11.43) completed the Iron distance at Roth. Both events had spectators numbering into the hundreds of thousands. The four Triangle athletes suffered a day of pain for a lifetime of pride.

Here is my A to Z of the legendary Ironman:

**A - Almere, Holland.** This is where I did my first Ironman race in 1990. I thought I only wanted to do one. My memories of that day are being caged (literally) on the beach, of fog on the sea and of the start being delayed for 45 minutes while we waited for the fog to clear.

That didn't do anything to help the nerves! On the bike ride I got five punc-

tures and only had four spare tubes with me but thankfully necessity is the mother of invention so I managed to make it to the finish line. It's the only Ironman race where I ran a sub four marathon.

**B - Benone.** This was to celebrate the millennium. I was Race Director and then also took part in it. The weather was glorious. The sea was as calm as a mill pond. I got a personal best – and ended up under an oxygen mask on the finish line.

**C - Copenhagen.** This is the only Ironman race which goes through the streets of a capital city for all three disciplines. I had finished antibiotics the day before and wasn't in the best of form. I finished absolutely stone last but the winners were there to greet me on the finish line.

**D - Determination.** To finish and also for the Discipline to get the training done. You can't rock up to an Ironman unless you have done the hard yards over many months.

**E - Elation on the finish line.** You never want that last 100 metres to end. It's like winning the Tour de France and Wimbledon. Every finish line is a win.

**F - Family and Friends.** I did a race in England called The Longest Day. That was

my most difficult race because I had nobody there to cheer me on!

**G - G.I.** i.e. Gastro Intestinal. If you get stomach problems that are bad enough during an Ironman, you will not finish. You can't eat, you can't keep anything down and you can barely take on water. You literally need a stomach of iron which is quite appropriate!

**H - Hawaii.** I have never qualified for it and I never will. I would need to improve by about 6 hours to qualify in my age group! A couple of years ago, I was stupid enough to enter into the Hawaii lottery.

That was yet another way the World Triathlon Corporation had of taking money off gullible suckers like me!

**I - Indoor Ironman.** I did this at the Roe Valley Leisure Centre to 'celebrate' my birthday a few years ago. I was able to swim behind Mervyn Kelly for 152 lengths then I did 180Km on a gym bike over six hours and then ran a marathon beside Stephen Keown on a treadmill. I actually put on weight because I ate and drank really well. At least I had no head

wind to face on the bike!

**J - Joke.** Try and think of a good joke as you are on the start line and about to run into the sea or a lough or a lake with 2,000 other lookalike lemmings all in black wetsuits, all trying to swim over the top of you. You are going to need to hang onto that joke because you will certainly need some good humour to get you through the next 12 - 13 - 14 - 15 - 16 hours of a long day.

**K - Kalmar in Sweden.** My memories of that are of Sharon getting me an ice cream during the run and of 15 minutes spent trying to put on special calf socks after I came out of the water. I was able to locate my bike because I parked it beside a big tree in the transition area! K is also for Karnten in Austria.

That was a tough race because my back seized two weeks beforehand. I couldn't actually stand up straight. I took a Valium the night before the race – the effects wore off on the second lap of the bike!

**L - Lake Placid in New York State, USA.** That was a hot race. I never knew New York State was so beautiful. We biked through the Adirondack Mountains and the Americans were typically friendly and garrulous in their support.

**M - Moravianman in the Czech Republic.** My daughter Hannah looked after me and William O'Kane when we completed that one. It was really hot during the run. I remember talking to one competitor and the next thing I knew he keeled over into the ditch with heat stroke. I saw him two hours later. He was one lap behind me but still going strongly!

**N - Normal.** There is nothing normal about the amount of training you have to do for an Ironman and there is nothing normal about the pain you are about to put yourself through on race day! N is also for nutrition – you have to eat constantly all day!

**O - Organisation of an Ironman trip.** You need a checklist. You need to make sure everything is in your bike bag. When you get to the airport in the country of your race, you need to hire a car big enough to hold the bike bag. You need to make sure you put all of the race numbers on all of the right kit. You

need to have your bike kit in one bag, your run kit in another bag, your special needs section in another bag, your sun-tan lotion etc. Being organised helps not only get you to the start line but also the finish line.

**P - Poland.** Where I did the Iron Distance race at Szczecin in the North West of the country. My son Patrick was there to look after me and I felt sorry for him because it rained for six hours of the race. The best thing about that race was the entry fee – 30 euros!

**R - Roth in Germany.** It's got to be the world's best race outside Hawaii. I got my personal best on that course and believe me that will remain my Ironman personal best! There is a hill during the bike course which attracts up to 30,000 lunatics who blow horns and bugles, play drums, blow whistles and generally create a din that the Noise Abatement Society would most definitely loath! It's the only place in our sport where every athlete is treated like a rock star. Terrific race. Put it on your bucket list!

**S - Scotland where I did the Aberfeldy Race.** What I remember about that was hoping not to bump into the Loch Ness Monster or any of her relatives during the swim. We were in a very deep, very dark Loch! I also nearly got lost during the run section.

S is also for the start line. The hardest line of all is the start line. S is

and my feet swole to the extent that I had to bin my socks to try to get my feet inside my shoes.

**V - Venice.** Which I had the privilege of doing last year with Mervyn, Ian, Alan William and Stephen Morrison. I had a great swim and a great bike but couldn't run a single step – it was a rather long march to the finish line.

**W - Wolverhampton.** Where I did the Longest Day Race. I was suffering so much on the bike I stopped at one stage to try to throw the bike over the hedge but didn't have the energy so I had to finish.

**X - The X Factor.** Klagenfort in Austria definitely has that. The finish line is amazing. It's in a sta-

dium and by the time I finished it was dark and the lights were on and the DJ was giving it Dixie. You remember every finish line but you try to forget the many, many hours before that!

**Y - You...** You can do an Ironman if you train for a year and put your mind to it! Please join us in the Triangle Triathlon Club. We would love to help you on your journey whether it's a Sprint Race, an Olympic Race, a Half Ironman or the Big One itself.

**Z - Zzz.** On the finish line you might want a beer. You might possibly want a pizza but as soon as you make it back to your flat and have had a shower all you want most in the world is sleep...



Swim over! Only bike and run left. NCL29-16s



Peter Jack during the gym bike section of his indoor Iron Man. NCL29-15s



Eleven time Ironman champion, Chrissy Wellington, grabbing a selfie with TTC's very own Mervyn Kelly. NCL29-12s