

SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

From Limavegas to Lanzarote!

HAVE you ever done four races in four days? Well, I hadn't either but that was the whole idea of the Lanzarote International Running Challenge.

It's at the end of November every year. In Limavady, it was 5C. In Lanzarote, it was 25C - guaranteed wall to wall sunshine so Sharon and I set off for a wee five day break.

I wouldn't be able to do all four races as we flew out with Ryanair and back with EasyJet as there wasn't a flight every day. My TTC club mates, Anne Paul and Cheryl Cardwell, were on the same flight on the way out but they were staying the full week as they both had a title to defend.

Last year, Anne and Cheryl both won their age groups in the International Running Challenge and were back on a mission. There was only one problem - poor Cheryl was

injured and couldn't run at all.

The last time I saw her in full flight was at the TTC Duathlon in Magherafelt where she not only won the women's race title but placed 5th overall. Her frustration at not being able to compete was tempered by the fact that she had brought her wet suit and her bike helmet so all was not lost.

As for Ann Paul, what has this pocket rocket not achieved in our sport?

Ann has been dragging her bike bag around European airports ever since Methuselah was in short trousers. She is a multiple medallist in the elite European Duathlon race circuit but never received the credit she so fully deserved. Not only is

she a star at Triathlon and Duathlon, (where she now not only wins her age group but often places on the elite podium) she is a former Northern Ireland and Ulster Cross Country Champion.

So I knew when wee Annie P. got to the start line in Lanzarote, she wasn't there for the beer..... Whereas I discovered a wonderful local brew, tinged with lemon, which almost tasted like a health tonic!

POPULARITY

The races were organised by Club La Santa and have been gaining in popularity every year. This year, nearly 400 put their collective toes to the line.

Club La Santa is an amazing institution. It's the brain child of some Dutch sports enthusiasts who, about 30 years ago, decided to build a tourist complex based

entirely around sport. If you love sport, you will have 35 different ones to choose and you will be in heaven. If you hate sport..... Club La Santa is not for you!

A lot of running clubs see the challenge as a great end of season opportunity to run with only a vest and shorts, as opposed to putting on tights, hat, thermals and rain proof jackets, etc, and have a blast over several distances and on different terrain.

Club La Santa is on the west of Lanzarote and it's usually windy. The wind is hot which does make it a bit bearable but certainly made cycling there fairly tricky.

Lanzarote is, of course, a volcanic island and over a third of its land was covered in a huge eruption as recently as 288 years ago (a blink of an eye in tectonic plate terms) and some 126 volcanos blew their tops (that's

where we get that phrase from by the way).

After one of the races, we drove down to the very famous Montanas Del Fugeos/Timanfyna (fire mountains) where you can see brushwood catch fire because the earth is so hot and where water, poured into a funnel in the ground, emerges ten seconds later as hot steam.

The last geyser that we had seen was in Reykjavik in Iceland where it was a tad colder!

SPORTING ANGLE

Lanzarote and Club La Santa saw a gap in the market and pushed a sporting angle. Everywhere on the island, you see all ages running, biking, swimming, playing tennis or doing aerobics, etc, all benefiting from the African temperatures (the Canaries are a lot closer to the west of Africa than they are to Spain).

I got to know two blokes from Sussex as one of them was wearing a Castle Triathlon shirt in a race where I did MC last year. They came over in a party of ten and were able to stay for a week in the fantastic facilities of Club La Santa for 250.00 each - that's not a bad deal. That even included access to the gym and the amazing 50m pools - three of them in fact.

I remember swimming there years ago beside the German Elite Hawaii squad when not one single German had won the Ironman World Championships. Now, the Germans always seem to take first place. They are even better at the Ironman than they are at taking penalties against England in the footie! There is also a tailor made 400m running track where I set my PB for the mile many years ago (5.12 if



PJ all set! NCL49-35s

you are asking....). To stay in Club La Santa is just to live and breathe sport. The atmosphere is intoxicating and for some, a little overpowering but there is plenty to do, even if you are not a sports nut.

There was a group of 35 from the Crusaders Running Club down south and most ran but some took on cheerleading and buggy pushing duties. There was massive crowd also from Sparta - no, not from Derry but from Dusseldorf!

The only thing about Club La Santa is that it's a bit isolated.

It's 1K from the village of La Santa and La Santa is 5K from the next nearest village, so car hire is a must if you don't want to feel trapped.

We were staying in the capital Arrecife as it is not too touristy. As soon as we entered our apartment, I exchanged my shoes for running shoes and went off of a wee trot.

Running is a great way to familiarise yourself with the local streets, shops restaurants and places of interest so that when you emerge later, you have a vague idea about your whereabouts.

I remember going for a run as soon as we checked into a hotel in pre-glasnost Moscow. There wasn't a single sign in English (when I was there two years ago, there still wasn't) and as there was a pea soup of a fog blanketing everything, I had to run beside a river, count the number of bridges then cross over and then count back.

This was very much a relief as my Russian language skills left a lot to be desired - the joys of running abroad were about to be tested over the next three days. Join me next week to see how I get on.



Peter Jack pictured with Anne Paul and Cheryl Cardwell in Lanzarote. NCL49-32s



The famous blue track at Club La Santa. NCL49-33s



One of the outdoor pools. NCL49-34s