



A tale of two wristbands



The start line-only 200k to go...

ON the last two Sundays, I have worn a different coloured wrist band, the first one gold and the second red.

The events couldn't have been more different.

One was all pleasure and one was all pain but both were fascinating.

The gold band on my wrist was marked 'AAA' i.e. Access All Areas and I was helping out at Chris Evans' 'Run Fest Run' in Bowood House, Wiltshire.

The concept of the festival was music and sport combined.

Lots of people who love going to music festivals also love running so why not combine both?

Such a simple idea so why hadn't it been tried before?

Chris Evans, founder of 'Don't Forget Your Toothbrush' fame and the man behind the 500 'word' essay for children

and now with Virgin Radio, already organises Car Fest but this was his first venture into this new area organised by his company, Brand Events.

I was there to do MC at the running races of which there were many. On Friday night, there was a 5K which I was able to do as well as a midnight torch run.

On Saturday, there was a half marathon, a 10K, a 5K, a club relay, a kid's race, a road race etc.

You name it, it was available.

The course was challenging, over lots of hills and around a lake in the beautiful Wiltshire countryside.

It was hot and the effect of the valley seemed to act like a bowl trapping the heat.

I threw myself into the lake afterwards to cool down before going to watch the bands on Friday night i.e. Reef and Razorlight and with my 'AAA' pass, I was

able to get back stage and get a great view of proceedings.

Later, I made a cup of tea for the lead singer of Reef, a really humble bloke.

It was fascinating to see how much is involved back stage to ensure that everything on stage runs smoothly and sounds as good as it should.

I spent a lot of time talking to blokes like Paul, a security guard and Chris the lead sound engineer, hearing all sorts of tales of bacchanalia of rock 'n' roll gigs in the past – but my lips are sealed!

My co-commentator for the running aspect of the festival was a lovely chap from Newcastle, Lewis Moses.

He has run 3.41 for the 1,500 and he is a former GB International.

We dovetailed really well together.

Chris wanted to inject a lot of fun into the runs so he had four team

captains, Steve Cram, Paula Radcliffe, Colin Jackson and Chris's wife, Natasha.

I got to meet all of them over the weekend. The winning team was the one whose members ran the furthest over the weekend and the winning members (over 1,000 of them) would receive a free one day pass to the Car Festival later in the year.

This was running as fun and Chris used every opportunity to create as much fun as possible. We tend to forget how much fun running can be.

It sometimes all gets far too serious with chasing PB's all the time.

This was about running as a community, mums, dads, kids, everybody, in a beautiful setting, wearing your free t-shirt signifying whose team you were in.

Chris is no mean athlete himself, he did the half marathon, the

10K and the 5K one after another!

He wrote a piece for the Times recently where he talked about the joys of running.

He was driving home from work one day and he had a vision that he should run around a nearby lake.

The first day he only managed 100 metres before puffing to a halt but he built his distance up and now regularly does marathons.

I was offered a room in a local hotel but preferred the camping option.

I wanted to be going through the same experiences and privations as the punters.

The last time I was in a tent was in a mountain top in Borneo but my, I didn't realise how cold it would get in the middle of the night in the Southwest of England.

I had to put a pair of jeans on at 3.30 to try to get some heat.

Meanwhile the bell on the top of the tower of Bowood House rang every 15 minutes.... I must have got used to it because the next night I never heard it at all.

Saturday night highlights were DJ Faithless and a great set from Olly Murs, some of his songs have been streamed/downloaded over 100 million times and he certainly knows how to put on a show. Meanwhile there were talks in various marquees given by stars like Chrissie Wellington (10 x Ironman champion) and I did a Q & A with two chefs including Frances Quin, winner of Bake Off a few years ago.

What a great eclectic mix of people.

Sunday then finished with a Silent Disco.

It's not every weekend that you get to share a taxi to the airport with Steve Cram and Allison Curbishley, put a medal round the neck of

Paula Radcliffe and bump into Colin Jackson in the hospitality tent!

If the first weekend was fun, then the next weekend was the opposite!

One of my three athletic goals for the year was the legendary Wicklow 200 – Ireland's hardest and longest sportive with 2,697 metres of climbing into the legendary Wicklow hills, south and east of Dublin. Entry fee was just over €50.00.

I entered months ago, plenty of time to do the training – what could possibly go wrong?

My good friend and coach, Bill Black from London had given me lots of sage advice which included six-hour rides and lots of hills, needless to say with a lot of weekends away with a microphone, I had no hills done and only four rides of 100K, Bill recommended I pedal at 90 revolutions a minute so as not to tire too quickly.

All I had to do was double the distance and climb up mountains as well.

At least I was fit and healthy.... That was until 48 hours before the big day when I made some sudden unusual movement and put my back out.

I tried to ignore it thinking it would go away but it just got worse.

Hilary Finlay in the North West Independent hospital was able to see me as an emergency appointment and got me moving again and strapped me up with kinesic tape.

I took my first pain killers for nine months since the finish line of my last Ironman in September so I could try to sleep on Friday.

I had three and a half hours in a car to travel to registration which was in the Cycle Superstore in Tallaght just off the M50, what a shop!

It was huge and had everything connected with all of the paraphernalia of the biking world.

They even had Wicklow 200 bike jerseys but I thought it would be bad karma if I bought one before the race.

I then travelled down to Bray to find the GAA club which was the host of the event on the Sunday.

There were still posters up celebrating the home coming of Katie Taylor, who had recently become only the eighth boxer ever to unite the four titles available for a weight division, something that AJ spectacularly failed to do on the same bill in Madison Square Gardens!

It was then back in the car to find my digs for the night.

I could have stayed in the famous Druid's Glen Hotel or the Powers Court Hotel – or I could save €280 Euros and stay in a hostel snuggled into the foothills of the Wicklow mountains. For only €20.00, I got to share a room with Harrison from Lincoln, Jamon from Malawi, Aaron from Australia and Al from Colorado.

I was dying for the latter to say "you can call me Al" when we shook hands but alas for Paul Simon, he didn't!

I heated up a pizza in the communal kitchen and looked out at a double rainbow (hopefully a lucky omen for me for the morning after) and as a soft Irish night descended, I shared a table with a couple from Galway who seemed to know me from my MC duties.

It was off to bed at 10 to sleep fitfully.

Awake at 3.30, I eventually got up to have the obligatory pre-race bowl of porridge at 4.30. I am not sure if you have stood in a tiny hostel bathroom at 5 a.m.

slathering on the chamois equivalent of utterly butterly onto your nethers and onto the inside of your bib shorts for good measure but if that's what had to be done then so be it.

I headed into the start before the official kick off time at 7 when I saw a marshal on a street corner in Enniskerry and I learned that you could start the event as soon as you arrived. I was able to park only 10 metres from the start/finish line.

I pumped up my tyres, I started my computer on the bike and also my Suunto GPS watch and I rolled out.

It was about 9 degrees centigrade but at least it was dry.

The first bloke I bumped into (thankfully, not literally) was doing Ironman Cork in a few weeks (where Alistair Brownlee, double Olympic Champion makes his Ironman debut) and we had a good natter, but I knew I was keeping him back so he sped off.

I also knew that the only way that I could get through this slog was to take it easy, keep my ego in a box, be patient and keep my powder dry.

I have just finished Geraint Thomas's book on how he won the famous Maillot Jaune on the 2018 Tour de France and he wrote about only having so many bullets to fire every day and you don't want to fire those bullets until absolutely necessary, you want to keep them in reserve.

Geraint also casually mentioned the fact that he broke his pelvis in the tour one year but he still rode another two weeks to support his team leader, Chris Froome. Then there was Ireland's Dan Martin who broke a bone in his back and he had to be

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Summer fun