



“Fitter at 40”

Utah Race report

Well I turned 40 this year and I decided to mark this new period in my life by challenging middle age and the preconception that it marks the start of a decline. I had a thought that began to germinate as the year developed and has now become a reality. Having now completed Challenge Wanaka and St George Ironman I'm on a mission. This idea which goes against traditional Ironman programming and general common sense is the following:

- 40 years old
- 4 Ironmans in 12 months
- In 4 different countries
- Finishing in the top 4% in each race

I've dubbed it “Fitter at 40”

So far I'm on track, having placed 3rd at Challenge Wanaka in January and a recent 10th place at Ironman St George on the 7th May. I've now signed up for Ironman Korea on the 3rd July and will finish my personal challenge with Ironman Wales on the 10th Sept.

I know this isn't going to be easy as to finish in the top 4% means I can't enter a race undertrained and therefore I'll be churning out race intensity 25-30 hour training weeks for a vast majority of the year. Normally post Ironman sees me recuperate for 2-4 weeks but in the case of the time frames between St George Ironman on the 7th May and Ironman Korea on 3rd July it seems that the only non training days I'll have are when I'm flying to or from the races. Couple this with trying to balance work, which pays for the trips, and family, who support me on a daily basis I know I've set myself a tough challenge.

So that's the challenge! Tune in along the way to see how I get on. I'm sure they'll be some highs and lows, some pain and tears as well as a test of what the human body can do as a 40 year old. I don't feel old and I'm sure that if most people did even 10% of the exercise I do then their general health would improve greatly. It's going to be fun because for me 30 hours of training each week is just that!

Anyway, onto the Utah race.....

Dry, desert, Churches and a distinct lack of alcohol even for an Ironman athlete! I was the first Pro to arrive in Utah as the flights were cheaper at that time and my 40 year old legs need more than 7 days to recover from long haul flying. I was quite curious to see what Utah had to offer as my only knowledge of the area was its Mormon faith and desert landscape. My homestay, Vera, was actually Samoan and had lived in NZ for a big part of her early 20's so was very happy to have a Kiwi athlete to look after. I got to know the family, as well as other Utah locals and Ironman athletes, so well over my stay that I'd recommend the race to anyone who wants incredible hospitality, scenery and one of,

if not the, toughest Ironman courses. The number of St George residents who offered homestay opportunities should I come back to do the race again or even bring other NZ athletes was quite overwhelming. So if anyone is interested in this race let me know!

I'd chosen the race because I was hoping the notoriously difficult course would put people off and the fact that the higher paying Texas Ironman was 3 weeks later which may attract the faster pros. This race was a potentially very cold swim, 1900m of climbing on the bike and 650m of climbing on the run. Not ideal for a 79kg athlete but I'd ridden the Waitakare Ranges and run up and down Rosedale Rd in Albany with Kieran Doe so many times in my build up I thought I could climb okay for my size.

The weekend before race day was a bit worrying as the temperature was unseasonably cold and it was blowing a gale. The reservoir used for the swim was down to 14 degrees Celsius so I change my mind about the swim and instead ride the part of the bike route that the major climbs were on. The first part of this section is a valley and the winds were as strong as what we encountered at Challenge Wanaka this year so covering 40km in 2 hours had me hoping that the conditions would change quickly over the next week.

As race week progressed I met some of the other pros. An Austrian athlete, Ernst Moser, and I trained a bit together with the help of a local first time Ironman Eric Dansie. Eric proved to be the most incredible and gracious host and could not do enough for Ernst and I when he also had his first Ironman to attempt himself. Luckily the weather improved leading into the race and a couple of 30+ Celsius days had an immediate effect on the lake temperature as well as reducing the wind. Ernst and I had decided that considering our strengths and weaknesses we would be very close at the finish with me probably having the edge on the swim and bike and Ernst on the run. I know that one of the battles within the race, other than overall placing, is against those athletes you consider of equal ability. We had decided that based on the depth of the pro field (which unfortunately proved to be stronger than the Texas race) we would be hoping for a top 10 and it would be touch and go if we even got that high up.

Race day dawned and you knew it was going to be hot with little breeze. The lake had warmed up and all the uber skinny pros were discarding their neoprene caps before the start. Funny but I don't have that problem in the cold☺. The gun goes and within seconds all I can see is beautiful clear water and a small group of fish motoring away in the distance. I don't think I've ever been dropped so quickly from the lead pack which was quite a shock as I thought I was swimming as well as I ever have. The next 3.8km on my own gave me plenty of time to consider what went wrong and I can only put it down to a swim taper which was longer than normal and some poor navigation choices in the first 10m of the race!!!

I wasn't wearing a watch for the swim so as I exited the water with no one in front of me and the next pack 200m behind me I had no idea of where I was in the race. I could have convinced myself I was leading the race although I knew there was a group ahead but I had no idea how far. To find out later I swam 54 mins was really disappointing and something I'll rectify for Korea. I was however still ahead of Michael Weiss, last year's winner, so all was not lost. It did allow me to settle into my own pace early on in the bike and ride to my planned power output (270 watts average for those who are interested). I wanted to be slightly more conservative than usual on the bike as I knew the run was a killer at this race. I also knew that this pace would give me just under a sub 5hr ride and hopefully some fuel left over for the run. I know that Michael Weiss is one of the top 3-4 Ironman riders in the world and his 4hr 40min bike in winning the race last year was something I marvelled at. However on this day he would be outdone by Mike Twelsiek who rode 4hr 36mins which would put him close to 40km p/hr average for 180km with 1900m of climbing. Just a little out of my league and I'm actually not bad on the bike!!! Most of the top pros rode low 4hr 40mins which shows the level that Ironman riding is now at considering the difficulty of the bike course.

I found out during the ride I had exited the water in 11th but I felt I paced the bike well and for the second race running was able to build and eventually ride away from my closest competitors in the last 60km of the ride to reach transition in 7th and with a couple of minutes on a bunch of 5 other pros. No doubt it is a hilly ride but the last 20km is downhill so the legs get a little rest prior to transition. This is about where my race could have unfolded! In Ironman's infinite wisdom and to probably appease their fluid sponsors they dispense their water on the bike course in the bottle they retail in. It doesn't fit water bottle cages on your bike very well as it's made of a plastic that crumples when you squeeze it but doesn't always return to normal shape. Therefore I saw plenty of athletes discard theirs during the race in non designated disposal areas. As I finished the last water from one of mine I then struggled to get it to sit without rattling in my cage, so my low blood sugar decision to drop it wasn't the smartest idea I've ever had. As the bike marshal pulled alongside me to issue a 4 min stand down penalty for littering I didn't even bother to argue my case. As I continued to descend the hill to transition and the penalty box where I would conduct my stand down I took the opportunity to try to dismiss the negative thoughts and concentrate on the reality of my situation and the opportunity to stretch and relax during my enforced 4 min break. What ensued was quite a relief as when I pulled into the penalty box approx 3km from transition the head referee for Ironman, Jimmy Richetello, just happened to be manning the station. I told him I had a littering penalty but as all athletes do, argued that the bottles are inappropriate for their intended use. He asked me "did you litter on purpose?" I said "no" so he said "off you go". A 5 second stop! Maybe Ironman is starting to listen to the athletes!?

The temperature on the bike was okay as there was no humidity but you could tell the day was getting hot and that the black tar seal and warm desert breeze could come into play on the run. I hit transition and exited to my dismay as a group of renowned runners were only a few minutes down on me as I headed onto the run. I have however learnt in the last few years that absolutely anything can happen in Ironman and I know my running has improved and when faced with this situation I now set myself the goal that if they catch me it's as deep into the run leg as I can possibly make it.

To describe the run would be that you run up a false flat for 8km before the first major hill. When you crest this it's flattish for 2-3 kms then you run downhill to the turnaround and then repeat it all again. If you're not going up, you're going down. I held a little back for the first 21km and at each turnaround could see that Peter Vabrousek, an American pro and Ernst Moser were closing. Factoring in a couple of urgent port-a-loo stops in the first 21km they caught me and as always at this stage you're feeling the wear and tear. I had run 1hr 35 for the first 21km but was unsure if I could maintain that. I was forced into what turned out to be my last toilet stop at 23km and had to let the others run ahead. However this proved a master stroke! Going into the port-a-loo I was contemplating my 12th place position on the road and general state of fatigue but on exiting the toilet I had a metamorphosis! I could not believe how much better I felt and quickly bridged back up to the group and then ran through them. I was almost waiting for the good times to end but could see I was extending my lead and was back to 10th and feeling as good as you can by the 30km mark. I was able to push on and ran strong for the remainder of the race and although I can't account for the time spent pondering life whilst in the toilet I'm sure I negative split the run. I'm very pleased with my race execution and pacing and it's a first for me to use my run in confidence in a race situation.

So 10th place pro at the finish and my friend Ernst Moser was 11th. I can't say I was disappointed for him☺

It's about time I did a sub 9hr Ironman so I'm hoping Korea and Wales are slightly more forgiving courses and temperatures.

I'd like to thank my sponsors who have all helped in getting me into the condition to race well. I truly enjoy the relationship and their support and strongly endorse the products and services they supply.

Here's to the next good result.

Cheers,

Bevan

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