

PROLOGUE

Our story begins as the teams assemble at the ANZAC memorial overlooking the remarkably blue waters of Bass Strait. No. Scratch that. Our story really begins in the days leading up to those fateful events at [Torquay](#) on Sunday, the 2nd of March.

On Wednesday, February 20, AL Prez releases an initial seeding list comprising 24 names, including a very shaky (at that stage) yours truly. Wes Benson answered the call, relegating me to the relative comfort of being 1st (& only) emergency. Matt Anderson then also indicated his availability to run, so things were looking good: 6 full teams, plus 2 emergencies. 😊The singlets were ordered.

Monday, February 25, & wrong way Denti pulls the plug. Perhaps he realised he'd have no chance of navigating the challenging Torquay course. Purvis also declares himself out of the event, but with Troy Boy joining the list we still had one emergency. Nothing to worry about.

Later that afternoon however, a whisper starting circulating about a certain recently signed up Miler & long time Friend of the NAB, having injury & family concerns. Time for me to start training! Thursday afternoon & the decision has been made. Cans out; GGO in. Pity help the captains. But even worse than that, another new Miler has pulled up sore during a Friends session & is in doubt.

Friday morning & all hell breaks loose. Wes Benson is out! So is Dizzy; probably. Fat Ass gets off his & works his contacts feverishly, finding a replacement for Benson in Charlie El Hage. Meanwhile AL Prez has managed to convince our newest Miler, young gun Ryan Cantwell, that a Relay won't put any strain on his dodgy hammie. While we're talking about dodgy, Dizzy goes onto the emergency list declaring that his calf "might" be ok, while NFM with the dodgiest knees in town announces that he'll run if we're desperate.

Back to 24 runners & 2 (dodgy) emergencies. Quite a feat considering the events of the previous few days. Full credit to AL Prez & Fat Ass for plugging those gaps. There was still one more twist to come with the announcement late on Friday that Mark Purvis was now available. What a dilemma? Purvis or GGO? The nod went to GGO mainly on the basis that he would be slow enough to provide some balance to the top heavy field.

So the list was finally set. Twenty-six names to form 6 full teams. The only catch was whether or not everyone would make it to the start line – on time!

I've got to acknowledge a masterpiece of pre-emptive misleading information by Fat Ass. Having recruited El Hage into the fold, he took it upon himself to make sure that Charlie had all the necessary information. Fat Ass had been warned that Charlie was ALWAYS late, so he explained to him that he really had to be on time, & of course Charlie told him that he would. However, our co-organiser couldn't get the start time right & he mistakenly told Charlie that the event started at 8:15am, rather than the correct start time which was 8:45 am. Charlie was true to form & rocked up at the assembly point at 8:48am! Just as well Fat Ass can't get his facts right.

All that would be enough to turn an organiser's hair white, which could explain why NFM looks the way he does after organising so many relays over the years. However, the pre-race dramas still weren't over.

On the night of race eve, Fat Ass got a text message from the Mullet asking him if he had a portacot! Apparently Heidi gave PM one job to do before they departed from home for their pre-race overnigher at Lara. Thorny was no help to his co-conspirator, making it clear that he wasn't a dad yet and "what on earth would make you think that I have any contacts in Lara"! Fat Ass spent the next 30 minutes trying to track down a Lara-based portacot, including calling one of Charlie's Vets friends, explaining that he was a friend of Charlie's & he was hoping to borrow a portacot for a friend! (The things that go on behind the scenes at one of these events are mind-boggling!) Eventually PM made the 30 minute drive to Fat Ass's to borrow their portacot, but in true Relay style, as he was leaving, he suggested to Heidi that it was probably time for Lola to go to bed, already having forgotten why he was about to head out in the car. Nice one PM.

Could anything else happen before getting the show started? Of course it could. We won't worry about me being late to pick up Ryan. After all, I was just getting into the right frame of mind for the day ahead by moving slower than expected. No, the real drama was much more ... ummm ... real.

Al Prez was heading down the Highway ahead of schedule with Slips, Smoothy & GG. Just as well they were early, because they got a call from LG that Dave Westerman's car was having electrical faults in Geelong. In the absence of a full, mechanical report (which I can arrange if you like), they stopped for a "coffee", but when Dave tried to re-start the car he only managed to start the alarm rather than the engine. RACV were ready to help of course, including free towing for up to 20km. Anyway, AL & company had to double back and collect the stranded pair. Actually they could only collect one of them because that filled their car. So they also arranged for House to do a run by to fit both of them in. The pick up point was McDonalds. The

question must be asked as to why LG and DW were at McDonalds in Geelong? LG claims it was to get a coffee but anecdotal evidence suggests he was loading up pre-race on about 5 bacon & Egg McMuffins washed down with 3 serves of Hot Cakes.

What else could go wrong? Nothing. Well at least nothing else went wrong before the team selection got under way. But that's another story. 😊

TEAM SELECTIONS

Our story continues as the teams assembled at the ANZAC memorial overlooking the remarkably blue waters of Bass Strait. The captains & flogs assembled in the early morning sunshine, eagerly awaiting the all important team selections.

As the lowest ranked captain, House selected first picking up Troy Boy. So far all selections had gone to seeding order. Thorny thought he knew better than the brains trust though & picked Dozer ahead of not just his mate, but ahead of Relay king, AL Prez! How important would that prove to be? Fat Ass then got things back in order by picking up the overlooked Nic, while Ant couldn't believe his luck to be getting AL Prez. Dr. Dan kept to the seeding order picking up Slips, before the Mullet stunned the crowd by overlooking Smoothie not once; but twice! In favour of Ando & ATB. Dr. Dan managed recovered from his initial shock in time to select Smoothie, while Ant continued to go by the book & added Mitho to his team.

Fat Ass went out of order to take a punt on Charlie. This was no random selection though, as Fat Ass had considered this long & hard in his pre-race musings. What Fat Ass didn't know at that stage was that Charlie was not quite in tip-top shape:

- having had pancakes for his pre-race breakfast because he'd promised a friend a while ago that he'd do breakfast; &
- having had his fair share of wine the night before because of another promise to another friend; &
- having raced a 9:50 3000m track race on race eve evening because he'd promised the team manager a month ago that he would run

Apart from all that, Fat Ass's decision might have held water. You can't knock Charlie's commitment though. If he says he'll do something then you can bank on it. Just remember to get the start time wrong though.

Back to the selection table & Thorny picked up the over-looked AW, to leave the remainder of the field as seeded. That didn't matter to House though. Based on consultation with his deputy, Troy Boy, he threw the list away. (Troy Boy has subsequently denied any involvement, claiming

that he "stepped away" from selection duties.) Anyway, House overlooked the 35 minute (when fit) 10k runner Cantwell & Westerman in favour of LG (!?!?) & Juanita. I mean to say, Juanita I could understand; but LG? If you're going to select a Goodman out of order, you'd think he'd pick a Good one. 😊

With only a handful of flogs left on the bench to choose from, Thorny had no hesitation in taking Cantwell. Fat Ass followed [suit](#) to pick the overlooked Westerman, leaving GG for the Ant. Dr. Dan had the final selection choice to make & decided to go against the (somewhat suspect) tail-end seeding order picking GGO, which left Hillas to [make up](#) the Mullet's team.

What ensued was a disgraceful display that was somewhat akin to seagulls attacking an open packet of fish & chips. Teams went helter skelter into the clothing "bin" to pick out their singlets. LG was disheartened to see that there was no black, so he compromised by taking the dark green because he figured it was closest to his beloved shade. He was later heard to comment that he should have selected the grey singlets because it is a "closer relation" to black. As if colour was going to have any bearing on how LG would perform.

The teams got themselves sorted out with their team cars & proceeded to the start of the first stage. LG's disappointment at missing out on a black singlet was eased slightly by the knowledge that at least his team car was **BLACK**. The 6 team cars were joined by a 7th vehicle. NFM had made the trip down as an observer, accompanied by his friend Bev. Chaperoning them was Dizzy who was true to his word & also came along as official & emergency. The little Hyundai & its occupants were set for a big day. In fact that car almost certainly covered more kilometres than any other car over the course of the relay. More on that later. 😊

Final instructions were given out at the start line, including the very complex Garmin watch operating instructions:

- the first runner of the day for each team needed to press the large button on the front that had red tape over it;
- as each runner started their stages, after fastening the Garmin to their wrist, they were to press the other large button on the front of the watch, i.e. the one **WITHOUT** the tape;
- when the final runner of the morning completed stage 8, he or she needed to press the taped button.

Sounds simple, doesn't it. What it doesn't allow for is the mentality of a distance runner on edge at the start of a race. Some of the teams pulled the operation off without a [hitch](#). Others had minor issues that largely stemmed from knocking buttons when fastening the [watches](#). Some teams though just had no idea!

AL suggested to his team-mate Mitho that a practice handover would be a good idea. Mitho scoffed at the idea, but ATB magnanimously filled in. Would Mitho's confidence in his watch-fastening skills prove to be justified? You can guess the answer to that.

Finally the preliminaries were out of the way. The stage 1 runners were assembled on the start line & we were ready to go racing.

THE RACE BEGINS

Bev ably fulfilled the role of official starter & got the boys on their way. With all runners having to complete the 3.27km loop, by the end of stage 4 we'd have a fair indication of how the day would pan out. Leading off for the Mullet's Light Green team was ATB. Smoothie led off for Dr. Dan's Grey team, with Mitho first off for the Light Blue of "GG and the Angry Ants". The honour of taking out Fat Ass's Purple team went to Nic, with AW running first for Thorny's Yellow clad team & LG first runner for House's Dark Greens.

Nic took off like a scalded cat & truly appeared to be running angry after the previous Sunday's tri-geek shemozzle. He'd obviously gone too hard too early though & paid the price with Smoothie coming in ahead of him to hand over to Slips. Nic tagged Fat Ass a single second ahead of ATB passing his watch off to Ando. Mitho was only 1 second further back as he passed off to AL Prez, & there was daylight before AW tagged Dozer. AL Prez decided to sit on Fat Ass & for about 400m thought he had him covered. 200m later though & AL Prez knew that it was Fat Ass who had him well & truly covered. Last in was the Dark Green team, but to be fair LG ran to seeding in passing off to Troy Boy over a minute behind.

Fat Ass overhauled Slips to move Purple into the lead & he tagged Charlie for the next loop. Slips sent the Grey skipper Dr. Dan on his way, with AL Prez handing over to his skipper Ant just ahead of Ando tagging his captain PM. Dozer had closed the gap to 4th considerably by the time he sent Captain Thorny off on his lap, & Troy Boy had also closed in slightly before handing the watch to House.

All of the captains were on the course now except for Fat Ass, & bragging rights were up for grabs. PM took the honours on this leg narrowly from Dr. Dan, but it was the latter's Grey team with a slight lead as GGO took off like a frightened rabbit. Mullet sent Hillas off in pursuit with Ant sending GG on his way only a few seconds later. Thorny had easily accounted for Charlie as you'd expect & sent Ryan on his way nearly a minute behind the leaders. Charlie handed the team watch over to Westerman & House had gotten his team to within a

minute of 5th place as he tagged Juanita.

GG proved far too good for GGO, passing him easily going up the hill & coming home in front for Light Blue. GGO was next in for Grey, but in the sort of timing anomaly that occurred a number of times throughout the day, the times show that Yellow started stage 5 in 2nd. Times aside, it was clear that there was going to be some close racing as the 1st 3 teams were all in transition at the same time. The danger signs were already there for the other teams though, with Westerman over a minute behind in 4th place for Purple. Just behind him was Hillas for Light Green & nearly a further minute behind was Juanita for Dark Green.

The race was on in earnest now as the runners took to the trails & beaches of Torquay and district. This is a 5Ms Relay though, so you know that the times only tell part of the story.

Dr. Dan tells how after running their loop, he, PM & Ant were doing a slow jog & passed a very elderly couple – the lady using a walking frame. The old gent was very supportive of all the runners by giving a token “good on ya fellas” as they passed. During the cool down jog Dan & company stopped near the elderly lady to let her pass, & she mentioned how she “loved the sight of a sweaty man with his shirt off”. We should all be grateful that Job wasn’t with them or it could have been a very different story. 😊

Other stories about the opening loop have provided some interesting insights into the navigational skills of some runners. All 4 members of House’s Dark Green team managed to run into problems. In LG’s case, he literally ran into a group of pram pushers. Somehow House managed to lead by example (despite running later), with both he & Troy Boy turning right towards the beach at the “T” intersection just before the boardwalk. Troy Boy said it cost him 5 seconds at most, while House said it cost him up to 10. Maybe it’s harder for a House to turn around. Juanita rounded out the team’s mishaps by turning left at the start of the car park & finding herself heading back to the start. That one was worth another 10 seconds, so the aggregate time loss for the team was somewhere around 40 seconds already.

Apparently NFM had tried to help with some course marking at the “T” intersection that baffled the Dark Green duo, but he claimed that the ground was too hard. Maybe he could have tried the Dizzy method? Standing at the intersection with a single out-stretched arm pointing in the correct direction. Then again that method is still hit or miss, as shown by Slips at Barwon Heads last year. (Sorry Slips. I couldn’t resist. 😊)

Time to hit the road & follow the runners.

OUT TO LUNCH

Considering the navigational problems experienced by some [runners](#) in the relatively straight forward first loop, this next stage promised to really test the directional skills of the competitors. In fact the fun started before the first corner. 😊

Remember how Mitho scoffed at the idea of having a practice watch handover? Well as it turned out he stuffed up his handover from GG so badly that it looked like he'd never get going. The scene was described by one onlooker as being "like a deer in the headlights". Eventually he did work out how to attach the watch to his wrist & get going, but a lot of seconds ticked by in the process.

This 5th stage started very similarly to the initial loop, except that instead of running up the asphalt, runners were directed to use the trail to its left. No [dramas](#) you'd think as the runners had had plenty of opportunity to scope out the turn by now. No problem for Mitho (once he got going), Smoothie, Weiland, Charlie & ATB, but the man who would be in black was another story.

Thorny decided to do his bit at the beginning of this stage to make sure that runners went up the dirt track and not the asphalt. LG sarcastically said: "Thanks for marshalling that corner, Thorny. I would never have figured it out on my own." Thorny subsequently dropped his guiding hand & said no more. LG then immediately continued past the dirt track and took off up the road. LG wasn't the only one to struggle though. Somehow Charlie managed to get to the boardwalk doing his initial loop, but this time took the [wrong turn](#) at team Dark Green's infamous "T" intersection. At least that was only a minor detour.

Meanwhile, undaunted by LG's lack of appreciation, Thorny felt obliged to ensure runners were on the right course so he stopped mid way to give directions. With gaps already starting to open up though, how long could he afford to wait? In the end he had to leave LG to his own devices (probably a good idea) and head for the change over point, hooning through the streets of Torquay & getting to the changeover just in time. Could this be a sign of things to come?

For the runners though, the rest of the stage went remarkably smoothly. (No pun intended.) Smoothie & Mitho had a great, close battle, with Smoothie taking the honours to hand the Grey watch over to Slips with a narrow lead. Showing that the old dog has still got some bark despite his dodgy hammies. Mitho handed the Light Blue Garmin onto AL Prez who continued the battle that had begun between the ex-Mercer co-

workers during stage 2. AW was next in to hand the Yellow baton to Dozer who had barely survived Thorny's maniacal driving, & hot on his heels was ATB for Light Green tagging Ando. Nearly a minute further back was team Purple's Charlie who handed off to Nic, while Dark Green's LG was another minute further back as he sent Troy Boy on his way.

The runners had been warned about a feature that they had to run around unless they wanted to do some abseiling. Five of the runners heeded the warning. Can you guess which team needed a bit of additional help? Yep, Dark Green. It took some frantic gesticulating from Thorny driving past to steer Troy Boy around the obstacle. To be totally honest though, Slips, AL Prez & Dozer all made similar mistakes in not going far enough right of the bricked, floral feature. Maybe the written instructions weren't crystal clear on that point, but you'd think the course designer's last minute instructions to Dozer would have done the trick. Or maybe not.

The stage continued with Slips & AL Prez trading strides in a great battle. Ando was looking strong despite running against higher seeds, but the same couldn't be said for Nic who was clearly not enjoying his running. The last 1800m or so of the leg was a predominately uphill gravel road. Unfortunately for the runners there was very little wind & the dust from the cars was hanging in the air. Slips commented that after each car past, you took four breaths before you got anything like fresh air. Hardly the conditions you'd want for the closing stages of a 4k race.

With about 1500m to go AL Prez overtook Slips to move Light Blue into the lead & started to pull away. Slips had had enough of eating dust though & fought back, so that there was nothing in it at the changeover. AL Prez did still have a lead for Light Blue, but it was very slight despite what the timesheet suggests. Consequently Ant started the stage narrowly ahead of the Grey skipper, Dr. Dan. Dozer had made up about 10 seconds to keep Yellow in the frame as he sent Thorny off to the beach. Ando was next in after a solid performance to tag the Mullet for the Light Green team. Nic was next in for Purple as he sent Fat Ass on his way, but Troy Boy had made up a full minute for the Dark Green team, giving House something to run for.

The captains had saved the Point Impossible nudist beach leg for themselves, & strangely there were no reports lodged about that leg. You can only imagine that the beach must have been deserted though, because some of the times were quick! So quick in fact, that in what proved to be a portent of an impending disaster, GGO only just made it to the changeover point in time to take the tag from Dr. Dan who had run a blistering stage. Ant had run a sensational leg himself to

keep the Doctor in his sights & was only about 50m behind as he tagged GG, who again had the luxury of being able to mow down his Grey counterpart.

Grey weren't the only team to get caught out. With the course designers both on course, there was some indecision about how to get to the next changeover. AW tried to take charge (pity help us!) & led the convoy to a point - not quite the right point, but pretty close. Unbelievably, NFM figures out the final clues & directs the group 100m down the road. Then the realisation dawned that the changeover was on the beach. "Way over there!"

While Thorny produced possibly his best run of the day to keep Yellow in the hunt as he tagged Ryan, Paul Hillas also produced his fastest run of the day. Running down the beach to accept the baton from the Mullet at the last minute, with a bit of help from the Mullet taking a big sweeping right hander to hook up with him. (I'd like to describe for you what Hillas looked like attempting to sprint in soft sand when he realised that the Mullet was a lot closer to the changeover than he expected. But you had to be there. 😊)

Fat Ass brought in Purple the best part of a minute later to send Westerman back to Torquay, & house was about 30 seconds further back for Dark Green as he tagged Juanita.

It wasn't long before GGO could hear the footsteps of GG squelching through the seaweed just behind him. As the runners returned to the Torquay [Anglers](#) Club GG took at chance by cutting across the soft sand, while GGO took the softer option of staying on the hard sand. With a mile still to go before the end of the stage GGO fell prey to the stalking Cantwell on the climb up from the beach. Ryan then set off in pursuit of GG & passed him in a strong display of calculated running. Strangely enough, these moves caused some serious concern for the Yellow team. As they were driving along trying to ascertain how young Ryan was going they were getting more & more concerned about the number of singlets they could find that were any colour other than yellow. Eventually though they found him up there in front.

That gave Thorny's Yellow team a narrow lead at the break over Ant's Light Blues. Dr. Dan's Grey team was just under a minute in arrears to round out the interim podium positions. Westerman brought Fat Ass's Purple team into the break over 2 minutes further back in 4th, while Juanita had overtaken Hillas to move House's Dark Green team into 5th 20 odd seconds further back. Rounding out the field was Hillas for the Mullet's Light Green team.

We're not sure how many times NFM got lost during the morning

stages, but he eventually joined everyone else at the ANZAC memorial for the lunch break. While searching for his co-official Dizzy, he spotted Jim Grelis who was down at Torquay with his family for a break. After watching GGO's performance on the beach it's a wonder that Dr. Dan didn't ask for a trade to give his team a chance to get back into the hunt for outright victory.

Relays are strange things, as anyone who's run one would know. It would be easy to look at the mid-point times & think that the race for outright honours would be between the Yellow & Light Blue teams, with the Grey team having a lonely afternoon in 3rd place. But with fatigue, stage selection & navigation issues to contend with, the race was far from over.

BACK ON TRACK

The [runners](#) re-assembled at the Point Roadknight Fishing Club, with AL Prez calling for a staggered restart. As ATB went to his team car to retrieve the notebook computer containing the official gaps between the teams, the minutes ticked by & things started to get a bit edgy. Or as one fellow correspondent noted: "Chaotic!" In the end there was a veritable coup with the President's wishes were thrown out the window. The masses opted for a massed restart just to get the show back on the road. As Thorny called the runners further & further back down the car park to the start line, GGO was constantly complaining about the fact that it meant even more uphill running. The slope of the car park was the least of his worries though. 😊

Finally all voices were silenced – except the starter's - & stage 9 got underway. Maybe the starter should have said "Run" instead of "Go", because the pack started moving at a pace more commonly seen on the 1st 2 laps of a pursuit at a velodrome. Dark Green were playing one of their trump cards on this stage, pitting their number 3 against a gaggle of number 4s.

The lead group of Westerman, Cantwell, GG & LG quickly put distance between themselves & the final duo of GGO & Hillas, but LG couldn't shake the threesome of number 4s. While the 4 leaders were keeping each other honest all the way to the end of the stage, GGO was struggling just to keep putting one foot in front of the other, [climbing](#) probably the steepest hill he'd ever tackled. Just as he was thinking about doing a Dozer & walking ... (Oops we haven't got to that bit yet. 😊) ... motivation to pick up the pace came in the form of a loud hiss from the undergrowth at the edge of the path. It was then an out of control downhill from GGO until getting to the car park behind the Anglesea SLSC & wondering: What next? If you look closely at ATB's GPS track from the afternoon, you'll notice a slow & wide path through

the car park.

Up ahead though it had become apparent that Dark Green's gamble had not paid off. The stage was virtually a time trial for the number 4s, with Ryan the top seeded of the group justifying his place in the rankings (as distinct from his place in the team selections) by taking the honours narrowly from GG who had set his team up beautifully for the afternoon. LG also justified his seeding as a number 4 (as distinct from his selection as a number 3 😞) by finishing the stage in 3rd, with both he & Westerman close behind the leaders. GGO was over 90 seconds slower than Cantwell over the short but hilly stage, & Hillas was another 40 odd seconds further back. All that meant that Yellow & Light Blue were still locked together, with Grey slipping back. Purple's lead over Dark Green had narrowed, & Light Green were now over 6 minutes off the lead.

Until this point in the relay there had been little variation between the teams' tactics as far as selecting runners for stages was concerned. Thorny & Fat Ass knew the course better than everyone else, so when they sent AW & Charlie out you had to wonder if this stage was going to be as tough as it looked on paper. Especially considering the Magpie Scumbag's reputation for hill climbing. Light Green & Grey had sent out their number 3s as well, but in those teams there was little to separate the 2s & 3s. In contrast, House had decided to do this one himself making him the sole captain on the course, & Light Blue sent AL Prez out.

So as AW, AL Prez, House, Charlie, Smoothie & Ando took off towards the beach, the cars took to the highway to greet them at the Eumarella Scout Camp. It was probably fortunate that the runners had no idea of the severity of the climb that lay ahead. The spectator fleet had a bird's eye view of the runners from about 1km out from the finish, & what they saw wasn't pretty. House was first up the hill, followed by a white looking AL Prez, & each subsequent runner looked sicker than the one before.

Some interesting words have been used to describe the final climb on that stage, but perhaps a runner's personal, verbatim account is the best way to sum it up:

"One day, after lots of therapy, the nightmares may stop. Start about 10 seconds back from AW. (Interesting choice from team yellow on what was a killer stage. Should have been a Dozer stage I reckon). Catch him through the tight Ti Tree and nearly got [coat](#)-hanged by the trees about 6 times. Get caught by House just after going up the boat ramp. House goes through the gate and ends up on the wrong side of the fence. Gets back on the right side about 300m later through

a gap. Through the middle section on loose gravel and a gradual climb, I was running at about 3:50 pace but it felt about 5 min pace. Took some comfort that House was only going away slowly from me. Get to about 3.2kms and knew a hill was coming up but had no idea what I was about to hit. At 3.4km I hit some steps and feel like I'm going vertical. At 3.5kms legs are starting to crumble. At 3.6kms I was GORN and it was just survival mode. Someone yells out keep going, "1 more corner and you're done". I reach the next corner and someone says "1 more corner and you're done". I hit the next corner and see the finish about 20m away. Thank friggin god. Hand over the baton and slump on the fence. That was a blo*dy tough hill. (AL)"

Some explanatory notes may be in order for those who weren't on the scene. The data quoted by AL is just some of the information displayed on the Garmin [watches](#) ("batons") being worn by the runners. The only warning that the runners had in their course notes about that final climb was: "Leave a little in reserve for the final climb!" The well intended directions to AL Prez, & the other runners, about only having one more corner to turn was just slightly mis-timed because by that stage the runners were barely moving. "Horrific"; "Stupid"; "Ridiculous", are just some of the (printable) adjectives used by the runners to describe the hill they'd just encountered. The look on Smoothie's face really said it all. Hopefully some photos will become available over the next week so you can gain a greater understanding of the now infamous Stage 10 hill.

Getting back to the racing side of things & House had put Dark Green into the lead (on the road at least) for the 1st time in the day when he tagged Troy Boy. AL Prez had Light Blue in a great position for the overall win as he was next in to tag Mitho (who was still struggling to put the watch on). AW sent Thorny on his way to keep Yellow in outright 2nd, but now over a minute behind. Smoothie kept Grey in outright 3rd as he staggered to the changeover where Slips wasn't sure whether he should take the watch or call for a medic. Charlie was next runner in for Purple, passing the baton to Fat Ass, while Ando had closed the gap by over a minute for Light Green as he handed the watch to the consistent ATB.

There's not much to report on stage 11. The car detailers will have to work double overtime to remove the sweat stains left in the team cars by the stage 10 runners. Troy Boy had Dark Green clear leaders on the road, despite having headed towards the trail near the beach instead of doing a sharp left up the road to the finish. A mistake which cost him 10-15 seconds. Thorny had overtaken Mitho, as you'd expect, but he only managed to put about 30 metres on him before handing over to Dozer. There must have been some karma happening though, because Dozer wasted all of his lead trying to fasten the watch on his

wrist. Of course Dozer had plenty of encouragement going his way & he nearly fell for the "don't worry about it, just go" line. As Dozer finally got going he knew that Ant was right on his tail. That left Light Blue in a strong position with their number 1 on the track against Yellow's number 2. Dozer managed to use the traffic on the tight twisty trail to hold Ant at bay for a little while, but once the trail opened onto the beach Ant quickly made his move.

Meanwhile Slips had run an absolute blinder of a stage for Grey, taking over a minute out of Light Blue's lead & recording a faster time than Thorny. That set Dr. Dan in hot pursuit. I've learned since the Relay that the Doctor had added incentive to close the gap to the leader, as Juanita had promised to "finish the stage naked". Sadly for the boys though, Juanita didn't carry out her promise, & reports are that the only naked bodies on the beach needed a good shave.

Back at the changeover, Fat Ass brought Purple in next with what was narrowly the fastest time for the stage & he tagged Nic. ATB was a minute back for the Light Green team as he handed the Garmin over to the Mullet.

Meanwhile, at the pointy end of the field the leaders found the sand giving way to something else. Dozer was wondering whether they were now running on kelp or piles of short and curly that had been washed ashore. The end of the beach run arrived with a couple of metres of rocks then 20 metres of soft sand. Just enough to take all momentum away from the runners before they hit a very, very nasty little climb. As Dozer zigged and zagged his way up, he was begging for Ant & Dan to send down some ropes to haul him up from his hell, but alas each corner seemed to get steeper and his resolve was broken momentarily. You've heard of a "Baker's Dozen", well now we have the "Dozer's Dozen". That's the number of steps it takes to destroy a runner's credibility. Not strides, but "steps". Walked steps!! Forget the fact that the steps were probably quicker than the preceding strides, Dozer has joined the "Stepping" brigade. I guess he's just been hanging around with AL Prez too long.

Anyway, by the time he got to the top of the climb, Dozer was a whimpering shell of the 2:45 marathoner of last October. Any recollection of directions, or even the ability to look for an arrow, was lost. It felt right to go right, and so he did. When he came to a dead end he figured he'd stuffed up. Still, he could see a track on the other side of the fence so he climbed through it and turned left. Another dead-end! So he went back and tried the other way, & eventually found a group of people and someone willing to take the watch from him.

So far all of the navigational blunders had been fairly minor. Except of course for NFM who was proving to be more directionally challenged than a tri-geek on Beach Road. It's a pity we didn't have a Garmin in Max's car to see where he went over the course of the day. Anyway, NFM getting repeatedly lost was of no great importance to the running of the event. It just makes a good story. 😊 Things were about to go awry for a lot of runners in all sorts of ways as the event approached three quarter time.

Dr. Dan, Ant & Dozer all overtook Juanita & proceeded to the end of the stage. Juanita wasn't so lucky though. After managing to negotiate the path up from the beach to the 1st car park, Juanita couldn't find the exit to take her to the end of the stage. While she was still searching for the exit path, the Mullet & Nic arrived at the car park & were directed down a dead-end, coastal path by a "club legend" & his offsider who later admitted to not knowing what the correct course was. The boys then found the similarly lost Juanita, so the 3 of them did another 3 laps of the car park before guessing the correct way. Juanita later mused that if it wasn't for the boys also getting lost & finding her ... "who knows".

If you want to re-live the fun, then just fire up the GPS plot & watch Juanita & the boys getting lost in the car park just before Bells Beach. Of course Slips got a real kick out of that episode when he learnt of it. Some of you may recall that during the lead up to the event, Slips suggested to the course designers that "at some point on a leg that PM will run on, ... lay out 6 or so arrows in a circle". It looks like the arrows weren't required. 😊

While all that was going on, the leaders were taking care of business. Dr. Dan had moved Grey into a narrow lead on the road as he tagged Slips. Ant sent AL Prez after him a few seconds later & still in the outright lead. Dozer passed the team Yellow watch to Thorny, but they were now in 3rd place both on the road & outright. Somehow Nic opened up a minute on the other lost duo as he tagged Fat Ass. Equally strange, the timesheet shows Juanita tagging House a few seconds ahead of the Mullet passing the baton to Ando. Another timing anomaly, or did Juanita really out sprint the Mullet from the lower car park.

However the minor details panned out, the wash up was that at three quarter time in the Relay it was a race between two. Just not the two who were leading at the break. Some unusual strategies from the course designers had gone against their teams' chances. With 4 stages left to run, one can only wonder what other dramas were yet to unfold.

AND THEN THERE WERE TWO

With four stages to go the Grey team were leading on the road, but trailed the Light Blue team by nearly a minute on overall time. Yellow were over 30 seconds further back, but they were clinging to the hope that they still had an outside chance if team captain Thorny could “pull something magical”. I don’t know what magical thing Dozer wanted Thorny to pull, & I’m not going to ask. 😊

Back on the road though & Ant’s great handover to AL Prez meant that Light Blue had negated the slight edge that Dr. Dan had given Grey as he’d handed his team watch to Slips. The uphill nature of this leg would surely favour AL Prez & it was a matter of whether or not Slips could minimise the damage to keep Grey in the hunt. As it turned out, AL Prez only beat Slips by 10 seconds on the stage, giving him the overall honours for their 3 head-to-head battles by precious little.

Meanwhile, the course designers had decided that this was a skipper’s leg. So Thorny took over from Dozer, but with a 90 second gap on the road it was always going to be a very big ask. When Fat Ass finally got the watch off Nic (fancy giving Thorny’s mate a leg requiring navigation 😊), Purple was totally out of contention for even a podium position so he was just battling to salvage some pride by bringing his team home ahead of the Others. Mullet sent Ando on his way about 5 seconds later & Juanita handed the Dark Green watch over to her captain, House.

This was one of the longest & toughest stages of the day & its uphill nature meant that teams could make up a lot of time – or lose it! Considering that Ando was the lowest seeded number 3 & he was up against a trio of number 1s & a pair of 2s, his run was one of the best legs for the day. House’s run on the other hand was quite possibly the worst that didn’t include navigational errors. His teammates were probably wondering if he was tapering for the King Island Imperial 20, although at least he kept his shorts on. 😊Thorny managed the 2nd fastest time on the stage making a big difference on the scoreboard, but only in the gap to 4th. He’d only reclaimed 4 seconds from AL Prez & his team was now out of the race for the win & resigned to taking 3rd place, which they surely couldn’t lose. Fat Ass was quickest on the stage, but only by enough to consolidate his team’s 4th position.

While the other teams were squabbling about the minor placings, out the front Dr. Dan had overtaken Ant to get Grey back in the lead on the road & keep the race alive. The downhill nature of this leg made for some very quick running & the Doctor was up to the challenge. Ant wasn’t going to lie down though & his strong run meant that Light Blue still had an overall lead of 30 odd seconds at the penultimate change.

Dozer was in a lonely third place on the road, facing the prospect of running against Dan & Ant again but this time he was giving them a start. Dozer wasn't having fun anymore. At least Thorny had the sense to strap the Garmin on Dozer's arm this time, so that probably saved the best part of a minute. 😊 Nic was sent on his way minutes behind for Purple. Troy got his team watch just ahead of the Mullet who was determined to lift his team out of last place. For a while Dozer kept the leaders in sight, but when the downhill really kicked in what he saw disappearing into the distance looked more like the leaders were peddling resistance free kids bikes than running.

Behind him, in a display reminiscent of Monument Track at Romsey a couple of years back, the Mullet nearly managed to get himself lost on possibly the easiest navigational leg of the day. All he had to do was to turn left at a T-intersection about 1.5km into the stage & then follow the road to the finish. An eyewitness reports that he managed the left turn, but about 4k into the stage he wanted to turn off the road & he kept looking back to Troy asking him for directions. After much pointing & yelling by Troy, Mullet eventually got the message & safely made it to the finish. To quote the eye witness: "He is a worry." 😊

Grey knew the odds were against them, but took a gamble on sending Smoothie out against the number 4s in the slim hope of getting the team into a position to race to the flag. GG had the job of keeping Light Blue in the hunt, confident that their last stage runner would easily account for his Grey counterpart. Grey's 22 second lead on the road, still had them nearly 40 seconds behind Light Blue overall. Ryan was minutes behind for Yellow, just hoping that they at least had 3rd place sewn up. The Mullet had run a great leg despite his rubber-necking, to send Hillas off next. LG & Westerman respectively took to the road for their teams a bit later.

With all of the runners on their way & the leg being a short & quick 3km, there was no time to lose in getting to the final changeover point. AL Prez led the convoy, with GGO following him as directed by Slips in the passenger seat. With time ticking by, the cars started passing streets that weren't in the directions. AL Prez pulled over & walked to the team Grey car in an obvious ploy to milk even more time. GGO waited what seemed an eternity for a break in the traffic before making a U-turn followed by a frantic drive to the changeover (wherever that was), testing the suspension over some speed humps in the process.

Meanwhile back with the runners, Smoothie knew that he had to open up a lead of over a minute to give his team any hope. In a near metronomic performance, he got to the changeover 62 seconds ahead of GG. Mission accomplished. The two teams were now level on overall time. All Smoothie had to do was hand the Garmin over to

GGO for the dash to the finish. Of course that would have been easier if GGO was there, instead of sight-seeing in the backstreets of Torquay. In the 58 seconds that Smoothie had waited, it's understood that team Yellow, whose members were the only other runners in the area, learnt a few words that would probably result in this report being banned if they were to be reproduced. Thorny recalls Smoothie commenting along the lines of: "Where the bloody hell are they? I've just busted my hump to put time into Mitho (?) & now they're not here to run the next leg."

To say it was deflating for team Grey would be an understatement. As GGO was still strapping the Garmin onto his wrist, GG tagged Mitho. What were the chances of GGO beating Mitho by a minute on a 3k stage that included some tough soft sand climbs? To say "not good", would be quite an understatement.

Team Dark Green was finishing its relay in typical (for them) form. LG showed that he had one thing in common with his fellow number 3 Smoothie, by swearing his head off as he discovered that he too had no team-mate to tag. His team car had followed another team car to the next stage, only to realise that it wasn't a team car at all; it was NFM! Max says he wasn't even going to the changeover, but based on his exploits over the course of the day he probably wouldn't have found it if he had tried. So we'll never be 100% sure where Max was going. Anyway by the time Dark Green got to the changeover, LG had been waiting 2:07 & his mood was as black as his training T-shirts.

Surely it was a foregone conclusion now how the day would end. Or was it? 😊

FIGHT TO THE FINISH

GGO was quickly overtaken by Mitho & watched the Light Blue singlet ease away. The only chance for team Grey was if Mitho was abducted by aliens, or got lost. But if Mitho got lost, then GGO was likely to do likewise. That was made very clear early in the stage when Mitho called back to GGO something like: "Is this the right way." And GGO responded: "I don't know, I'm just following you." The gap kept widening. Every time GGO rounded a corner he could tell that Mitho was extending his lead. Then came the moment when GGO turned a corner & Mitho wasn't even in sight. Surely he couldn't have stretched the lead that much so quickly. Could he? Another corner & still no Mitho. Can dreams come true? Did he really get lost?? As GGO came onto the boardwalk allowing him to see hundreds of metres ahead, there was no sign of Mitho. The only possible conclusion for GGO to make was that Mitho had indeed taken a wrong turn, which meant that he must now be behind GGO. But how far behind? Now GGO

really was running scared! Once off the boardwalk there was 1km to the finish (for those running the designated course).

Mitho wasn't the only one struggling to find the way home though. AW was charged with the task of bringing home a slightly dejected Yellow team. Fortunately his captain was a course designer, so following the course would be no problem. Would it? As it turned out; yes it would. Mullet reports having seen a panic-stricken AW looking very lost & nowhere near the course. Thorny (with nary a thought for defending his team-mate), reports that AW was heading towards Lorne instead of Torquay. Thorny was quoted as saying: "That's an awfully long way around". 😊 Inside information however has suggested that AW was actually setting up to take a short cut. His cunning plan might need a little work though, as his "shortcut" resulted in him running an extra 600m. A distance which AW estimated is about a kilometre further than the other navigationally challenged magpie scumbag out front, "who probably ran through backyards, over the tops of cars & burst through family picnics in pursuit of the most direct path home."

AW reports that his stage started to go awry when he ran too far down the road & stopped to read the map. (Is stopping as bad as stepping? 😊) Anyway, AW then doubled back through a park before roughly finding his way back, via the backyard of the Surf Club which saw him doubling back on himself again. Finally though he could see his goal & took the line that a (very sick & deluded) crow flies.

Let's quickly recap the state of play with the final stage in full flight. Mitho is off course somewhere; GGO is running scared; AW is fossicking through backyards; ATB is flying; Charlie is in 5th; & Juanita has finally got the watch off LG. Everyone else including the officials made their way to the finish line.

GGO stumbled across the line & collapsed on the ground looking as grey as his singlet, still wondering where Mitho was. A kind-hearted team-mate took pity on him & provided some shade, while the errant Light Blue team anchor came over & congratulated GGO on a good run. Yes, that's right. Mitho's shortcut had proved far superior to AW's, as Mitho had already finished & was halfway through preparing his victory speech. As it turned out GGO could have jogged at his normal pace & still finished a comfortable second. AW eventually got to the memorial to finish in 3rd. Fourth & 5th places were separated by a single second on overall time. ATB's blistering last leg anchoring the Light Green team was good enough to be the fastest time for the stage, but not quite fast enough to overtake Charlie of team Purple. A full 2 minutes further back was Dark Green's Juanita, but remember how much time that team lost at the changeover? Give them back 2 minutes & they would have narrowly taken 4th place themselves.

But "coulda, shoulda, woulda" doesn't count in the results sheet & the final result was a win to Ant's Light Blue team by 2:06 from Dr. Dan's Grey. Over 4 minutes further back was the mid-point leader, team Yellow, taking the last step on the podium. Any course knowledge that Thorny had was wasted by some very questionable stage choices. Relay debutante Ant Rickards on the other hand did everything right. Both as captain & when running, managing to stay very close to Dr. Dan in all 4 of their head-to-head battles.

Dr. Dan didn't make a mistake all day (apart from leaving the stage 15 navigation to Slips & GGO) & resumed the title of alpha male, even allowing for the Mullet's navigational issues. Fat Ass ran true to seeding & was unlucky with how his selections turned out. What a luxury 20-20 hindsight would be to have in advance. 😊 The Mullet was on the back foot right from the start, but bypassing Smoothie during the selections probably cost him nearly as much time as his team's navigational & equipment problems.

How can I summarise team Dark Green's day? To his credit, House stands by his selections. Troy was clearly the pick of the number 2s. Juanita & LG did outperform Westerman, but were stitched up by the wild card, Ryan. I guess they balanced out. House has said: "A few less errors could have seen [them] in at least 4th & challenging for 3rd." That final changeover alone accounted for enough time to prove that statement right. But how differently the day could have turned out if House had selected Ryan & the other Goodman! Then again, considering that the team couldn't even manage to work the Garmin in the morning, & they got lost more often on the initial loop than any other team for the whole day, I suspect that they still wouldn't have won. Some of the other results might have changed dramatically though.

Thanks to everyone involved. It was a big team effort in arranging the day. Thorny & Fat Ass for the course design; Dozer, AL Prez, Slips & GGO for the logistical side of the event; ATB for the Garmins; and special thanks to a long time supporter of the Milers, Alan Barkauskas, for providing the 7 teams with printed 5Ms singlets at no cost to the Club or the runners. Thanks also to the runners for supporting the event & providing a great day's racing.

The seeding was pretty close to right with some notable exceptions. Dozer & Nic traded places & Slips may have even out run Nic, but the different stages run during the afternoon make that a bit hard to be sure about. Charlie ran a bit below expectations, but the pancakes, wine & 3k race go a long way to explaining that. GG was the race winning standout, & he should have been swapped in the seeding list

with Westerman. If GG thinks that we'll ever forget this, he's crazy!
Here's a heads up for you, GG. Start training for Romsey now, because regardless of what you say you'll be seeded very high.

There was only one injury I've heard about from the day, & it's a strange one. On Monday NFM was complaining about a groin strain. "From what?" I ask. Getting in & out of the car? Or was it that all those inexplicable detours that led to him getting "lost" were something else? He did have his partner with him after all. And what was Dizzy's role in all this? Maybe some questions are best left unanswered. 😊

Everyone then headed down to the foreshore, where ATB slaved away with the Garmin's to sort out the results. A few runners went for a dip, while the others congregated around the BBQ & beer. In was here that NFM finally provided some value (other than comic relief) to the event by producing a pair of tongs. 😊

I'll leave you with a quote from a Forum posting placed a little over a week before the event:

*Rickards is good, but he can't carry Mitho over 4 stages.
(The Torquay Observer, Feb 21, 2008, 2:52 PM)*

----- **The End** -----

(Thanks to PM, ATB, DH, AL, BC, CT, RD, AW, SP, TW & JL, for their contributions.)

APPENDIX

Runner of the Day

Voting was held by 10 Committee members on a 3,2,1 basis and the winner was Glenn Goodman. Dan once again proved his talent as a strong relay runner coming in 2nd. The final tallied results were:

Glenn Goodman	19
Dan Hornery	13
Bruce Arthur	6
Shane Fielding	6
Ant Rickards	6
Dave Venour	5
Anthony Lee	2
Troy Williams	1
Juanita Liston	1
Gary O'Dwyer	1