

“Ironman™” Melbourne 2013 Luke Yeatman

The Preamble

Yes it was a long day, yes it was hard, yes I got the finisher's medal, towel and t-shirt but no-one can tell me I am an IRONMAN™ finisher. When the swim course was announced as a one lapper (which turned out being about 1500m) I felt a bit ripped off because I had paid for and was generally prepared for the full distance. Even prior to starting or having my marathon meltdown I knew I would have to do another IRONMAN™, no matter how well or badly this one went because it wouldn't be the full distance and I wouldn't be a true IRONMAN™,.

I also knew that due to being hardly able to run for the six weeks prior to the event I would need to do another IRONMAN™. No matter how well it turned out, I was very under-prepared for the run. My aim for IRONMAN™ wasn't just to finish or to tick something off the bucket list, but to go as fast as I possibly could.

Thankfully things didn't turn out so well and I managed to get my bad one out of the way in an event that didn't count. It would have been horrible to nail the race and be denied a sub 9hr30 or whatever because of the short swim. The training leading up to event and the race itself taught me a lot and hopefully I will be much better prepared next time.

I've always wanted to do an IRONMAN™. Guess it must have been my youth in the late 80s and early 90s perched in front of the TV on a Saturday afternoon watching Max Walker and Ken Sutcliffe front the Wide World of Sports on Channel 9. Each year the WWWOS would drag out the coverage over the entire afternoon. The most vivid things I remember from those viewings was Wolfgang Dittich coming off the bike ten minutes in front before getting run down and Dick Hoyt carting his son Rick around the entire course. When I was over in Boston at the marathon expo a couple of years ago, Team Hoyt had their own exhibitor booth where I was able to admire Dick's Paris Hilton tan and Bert Newton hairpiece up close and personal.

The WWWOS coverage also covered things like the Julie Moss crawl up the finish line and the 1989 Ironwar which finally saw Mark Allen get one up on the man who has to be the greatest of all time, Dave Scott.

As seems to be the usual with any big race I booked the tribe into some accommodation near the start of the event. This time we stayed at the dated, yet adequate Parkdale Motor Inn in Mordialloc.

Went to bed around 9pm and didn't feel that I slept at all when the alarm went off at 5.40am. Got up and had my pre-race breakfast of a chocolate hot x bun and 500ml of orange juice.

Once at race central I went into transition to put a couple of drink bottles on my bike and also dragged my bike shoes out of transition and clipped them into my pedals. I then proceeded to have a seat whilst my wife lined up for coffee and my kids jumped on the jumping castle. During this time the message went out that the race start had been put back and the swim had been cut short. I thought that if the swim was safe for half the distance then why not the full distance? Suppose there are people far more wiser and experienced than me calling the shots so I had to go with the flow. Since lurking on [transitions forum](#) I have since realised that people would have become fatigued in the rough water and the extra distance could lead to the odd death or two.

The Swim

It looked pretty rough and there were heaps of people but overall I found it pretty cruisy and easy enough, notwithstanding my apparent lack of speed. I went off course a fair bit and even t-boned some on coming swimmers at one point. The hardest thing is being swum over and swimming into people. Whenever I swam into someone I would stop but everyone else just seemed to keep going. This is where the experience of having done a number of tris or open water swims would be beneficial. Throughout the swim I kept repeating to myself to relax. After having a panic attack at the Geelong Half I didn't need any issues and just tried to take it easy and get through the swim with as little relative effort as possible.

Coming up to the turning buoy there was a lot on-coming traffic so I was surprised I didn't have a collision. This is probably where the swim was the roughest. Some people were swimming up and touching the buoy before coming back and other were going around. I followed the crowd and rounded the buoy before heading back

In watching youtube clips posted on [transitions forum](#) I now realise I inadvertently cut the swim short. Apparently there was another buoy another 100m or so past the first buoy that people should have swum to. I never saw it and from the general traffic I gather that most of the people around me never saw it either.

The way back was a bit less crowded but I worked out that whenever I got free water it meant I was going off course. Eventually after jig-zagging around the Frankston foreshore I managed to exit the water a full two minute jog down the beach from where I was actually supposed to come out. This wasn't completely due to my bad navigation as the current had taken lots of people towards Oliver's Hill.

As I ran along the beach with many other who also went off course I peeled down the top of my wetsuit in preparation for T1 but made sure I kept my swim cap on so the photographs could be identified later on.

I ran around the back of the transition tent then in the front door to find my bag hanging on its hook in a sea of empty hooks. Not a good sign. The results

shows my swim result as 35m22sec, place 1400 out of 1940 swim finishers. There were big traffic jams in the tent as people waited to get into the change room at the rear of the tent. I took this as an opportunity to put on my helmet and glasses so that the wait was as productive as possible. I finally got into the back of the tent where a volunteer helped me yank off my wetsuit and pack it in my bag. I was wearing an appropriately slimming black two piece under my wetsuit so put my swim stuff in my bag and threw on a pair of socks and headed out the door to unrack my bike.

Shortening the swim leave less time for the field to string out and in a race with no wave starts this means traffic jams. Having collected my bike I headed to the bike exit where there was little movement. I probably lost 20-30 seconds waiting to exit out of the transition compound onto the bike course.

Swim 35m22s 1400 out of 1940

T2 3m23s 298 out of 1930 (my best leg of the day!)

The Bike

Ever since I contemplated the IRONMAN™ I believed it was all about the bike. If everything goes to plan the bike leg should be over half the duration of the race. This means big time gains or losses to be made on the bike. You can't have a good race without a fast ride but this is finely balanced because if you go too hard on the bike you'll overcook yourself for the marathon.

Triathlon can be an expensive sport and I guess after you cough up the \$825 entry fee any other major cash you burn is likely to be on bike goodies. I've always ridden bikes on an off since I was a kid and my brother has raced for 25 years so I have a few bikes in the garage. I did not, however, have a time trial / triathlon bike.

I did some research and worked out I wanted a Felt B12 or a Giant Trinity so I set up some email alerts on eBay and checked Bikeexchange.com.au pretty religiously. I had a few false leads on bike exchange due to old ads but eventually found a [2006 Giant Trinity](#) on eBay for \$1500. I was a little apprehensive purchasing a second hand carbon fibre bike, especially one so old as it could have cracks or other issues, however so far the bike has been awesome. My research showed it once upon a time it was a top line bike, with Dura-Ace components, originally selling for US\$5,500 when this would have been at least AUD \$8,000. As part of the deal I also got a bike transport box for taking bikes on planes and some other goodies I didn't need and resold on eBay. The bike also had an x-lab behind the seat dual bottle holder which was also a bonus.

What wasn't so great was that my x-lab seemed to launch my bottles whenever going over bumps. This meant more cash as I acquired a couple of x-lab gorilla bottle cages, supposedly with twice the grip of the normal cages.

I didn't manage to lose any more bottles but for it cost me \$60 per bottle cage for the privilege.

On top of the actual bike I shelled out \$980 for some Hed Jet 6 carbon race wheels (half price from [Torpedo 7](#)) and \$100 for some tires and tubes for the race wheels. My brother lent me the aero helmet. He also would have lent me a bike and wheels but don't tell my wife that.

I've spent all the necessary (any maybe unnecessary) bike cash now, so short of my carbon frame cracking, I'll be set with bike goodies for the foreseeable future.



Coming into the event, of the three disciplines, I was definitely trained to perform best on the bike, even though I could have done with more kms and some specific training. For the three months leading into the event I was probably averaging about 300kms on the bike with most weeks around 350km. I was happy enough with this volume for my first IM but to put things in perspective I could see by stalking [PM on Strava](#) that he was averaging around 100km per week than me. I had him during the week but he'd kill me in the weekend doing big kms with his pack of Beach Rd cowboys. He was also doing very solid 40km morning rides twice a week with his shaved legged buddies, something which I will consider for next year.

During the training I really hadn't done any specific speed work or hard rides but averaging just under 36km/h at the Geelong Half Ironman gave me some good confidence. I really wasn't sure what time I'd ride. Thought that a realistic time was 5hr30m and a dream day would be 5hr20m.

Heading off into bike I didn't consider that I had 180km to ride, I guess I was in race mode. I just went out at a comfortable pace with no fear of the

distance. Less than 500m in I saw a dude on the side of the ride with mechanical issues. Thank god it wasn't me. It made me wonder exactly what can go wrong in the first 500m. This was a recurring issue – I was regularly seeing people on the side of the ride with issues. It really puts you on edge a little, hoping that you don't suffer the same fate.

There was a lot of congestion in the ride, especially over the first 90km but I was generally passing people so it wasn't a huge issue, except for blocking. In the world of triathlon you are supposed to keep left and blocking is where you ride all over the road and leave people behind you no where to go. There were a few packs who thought IM was all about drafting (ie being within 12m of the bike in-front). At times I ran up some bums and got caught around packs but generally I was always moving through (ie passing within 25 seconds of entering someone's draft) so I don't feel as though I was involved in drafting. I made up about 1000 places on the ride so I wasn't messing around trying to sit on wheels to get any unfair advantage.

During the ride there was a head wind but I didn't notice it too much as I was down on the bars and travelling well. I wasn't worried about my pace, just worried about perceived effort. In any case I had my watch on my wrist instead of the handlebars so I didn't get to see the pace too often.. Eating is a real chore and you need to have a plan and religiously stick to it. This is a learning I can take out of the event. I ate three gels and two growling dog bars and a few bidons of Gatorade and some water over the entire ride. I wasn't hungry or bloated but a "she'll be right" attitude needs to be adjusted for the next event. In hindsight I guess I should have eaten a lot more on the ride.

Going through the Eastlink tunnel was good fun although a few fools were right across the road so it was tricky to get past. My only mental downer for the day was that I thought we were going to turn around as soon as we got through the tunnel but we actually went another 1500m up the road until we were adjacent to the Springvale Rd off ramp.



After making the turnaround I realised how strong the wind was, as I had an awesome trip back to Frankston. I was in the biggest gear (53-11) taking it really easy cruising along 45kph. This pace wasn't to last the whole way as there was a vicious cross wind the last 8-10km back into Frankston but I averaged 40.9kph for the return trip and came through half way officially at 2hr29m08sec – under 5hr bike pace and two minutes quicker than my 90km

time from the Geelong Half. Coming back into Frankston was awesome as there was a 200m long stretch lined with supporters on each side of the road coming into the turnaround. There was also an MC yelling our names and revving the crowd up.

The second lap was much like the first although at around 110-115km my left calf played up a little and my left hamstring was a little sore. I was a little concerned that I may cramp up but took it a little easier and everything seemed to work itself out. The theme for the second lap was pretty much keeping it relaxed and not over cooking things.

With about 30km to go I was busting for a leak so I decided to pull over at the last aid station. I reasoned it was here or in transition and that the aid station would be a lot less congested. I also popped a couple of ibuprofen and paracetamol tablets that were pasty from being shoved down my wetsuit. There were a planned, preventative measure to hopefully reduce any aches or pains I may suffer later on in the race.

Coming into Frankston was a bit of a downer as it was a complete contrast to the first visit. A had expected some spectators however there was no one around at all until we got to the bike catchers.

As I came in to transition as I angled my foot to get it out of the pedal my calf cramped and I thought I may be in trouble. Apart from that jumping off the bike I felt awesome save for some sore feet caused by the pressure of pushing and pulling pedals around for 5hours. I had no wobbly legs and didn't feel fatigued at all. The worst bit about dismounting was trying to rip a gel off my top tube only for it to explode and put crappy, stinky, very sticky caramel gel all over my hands, cranks and bike frame.

Bike 5h11m01s 359 out of 1892

Bike to run transition

Coming in to the tent this time I was much happier as there were heaps of bags on the hooks and it was much less congested. I took off my skin tight (aerodynamic) tri top and slipped on the much more flattering and hopefully chafe preventing [Melbourne Midday Milers](#) t-shirt. I also changed my socks and off I went. I'm a little perplexed how this took over 3 minutes, but time moves differently in an event like this.

T2 3m23s 584 out of 1873

The run (well walk really)



The wonder of special effects. All my run photos actually made it look like I was running.

After having run a 1hr26m half marathon off the bike at the Geelong Half Ironman I should have been looking pretty good going into the IM run. I was thinking I should be able to go 3h15m at best (4.38 per km) and 3hr38m (5m10 per km) at worst. Unfortunately after winning my age group the week following Geelong at the low key Inverloch Triathlon with a 19.05 5km off the bike my calves gave up. My half marathon and 5km were at least 20 seconds

per km quicker than I'd been plodding around in "training" and my body [didn't like it](#).

In reality my run training was no more than jogging around three or four times per week at about 4.30 – 4.40 pace for a total of 40-50kms, with very few days back to back. Although it's been three years since I got hamstring tendinopathy I still don't have any confidence in my body to run hard and am not really sure if I'll manage any stand alone running races again. It was good to bang out a 1.26 half and a 19 minute five km without having any bum/hamstring issues, but it doesn't compare to stand alone races.

From the week after the half ironman (ie five weeks out) I couldn't run without getting right calf pain about 20mins into any run. It was not strained but just wasn't happy about running. The last six weeks leading into the IM I probably ran about ten times with nothing over 60minutes and most of the runs being 1km jog, 30 second walks. The last three weeks I did about four 20minute jogs. I suppose if I'd put in the work prior to this it wouldn't have been a huge issue but I was going to struggle to be ready for the marathon prior to breaking down. Leading into the race I only had two 20km runs under my belt with one of those being the Geelong Half.

Needless to say I was a bit apprehensive about the run although I hadn't given it a huge amount of thought. My pre-race nerves had been more about getting through the swim in one piece. The plan was to head off at 4m50pace and hold this for as long as possible.

I headed off on the IRONMAN™ marathon at what felt like a really easy pace – just plodding one foot in front of the other with no apparent effort. Looking at the garmin this pace was about 4.25 per km but I felt as though I physically couldn't slow down. Obviously I could have slowed down and needed to, but this is a learning to take from the event. Better too slow than too quick. Better to lose 10 seconds a km early on than 90 minutes over the second half.

Early on in the run some dude told me I was in 330th place or something like that which gave me a boost. I was expecting that I'd pick up a few places and run into the top 200 and have a great time of it.

About four kms into the run I was joined by Damien Turner from Ballarat who I used to run with as a junior. We got talking which was good however he was going a bit quicker than I would have liked. I strained a little to keep with him however I should have dropped back and run my own race.

It was about at this point that I felt a blister developing on my left foot. I had changed socks after the ride but in preparing my kit I grabbed any old pair of black socks from the drawer. They were not particularly tight fitting and were clearly rubbing me up the wrong way.

The run kept going okay, my pace was coming back to my desired 4m50 per km and things were fine and dandy. About an hour in I felt a bit bugged and thought I could do with a bit of a walk. Initially I put in some walking breaks of

20 -30 second and was still keeping the kms under 5mins. Then the walks got a little longer but I still managed to keep the kms under 6mins and then the wheels fell off and I couldn't physically run anymore and the kms ballooned out to over 7mins per km.

I don't know exactly where it occurred or what drove it but my left hamstring decided it didn't want to run anymore. My hamstring didn't cramp but seized up and refused to work and the bottom of my good calf/achilles was in deep pain whenever I tried to run. As I finalise this report in mid June my left hamstring is still giving me troubles.

My blister was giving me constant pain. For a bit I could put in little jogs but eventually all I could do was walk. I probably came to the realisation I could only walk with about 22km left in the marathon. It was around this time that some well wisher gave me the "it's not far now" line. I said "what are you talking about, it's not even half way". Maybe people think if you are "in the zone" or exerting yourself physically you are temporarily insane or have no comprehension of what is being said to you. It wasn't until the 21st km that I went over 6mins for a km (7 mins actually) but from then on I never went under 7minutes again.

Except for the constant blister pain walking wasn't too bad. I was keeping an okay pace but from the constant calculations in my head I knew that I had a long walk in front of me. I considered getting a mobile phone from someone and texting the family to give them an ETA as I was going to be 60-90 minutes after I suggested, but this didn't happen. I don't know why but I didn't get hit with a wave of disappointment about walking. I guess I was still in the Z, just hoping to get to the finish line as quickly as possible. For me, getting to the finish line as quickly as possible meant a quick walk.

Throughout my long walk the support on the sidelines was awesome. For the whole run route there was support and lots of it, even for someone walking along. I almost ashamed as I felt like an imposter as I wasn't running. There were signs on power poles and heaps of messages scrawled on the footpath. They were generally amusing and good to see.

I guess for lots of the "run" I was spurred on by the fact that I was ahead of The Job and House. I was starting to think they must have died themselves because I'd been walking for 90 minutes before The Job passed me and about two hours before House did. When passed I didn't care as this sort of event the real competition is between you and the event itself rather than others – even though I would still prefer to finish in front of people rather than behind them.

Over the course of the run I saw various Milers such as Spewy, PM, Dizzy, Bacchus, LG and Smurf. At one point I thought I saw Tilt but I reckon it was a mirage. Dizzy and Smurf walked with me for a few kms which was good.

Towards the end as I got within sight of the finish I felt a wave of emotion and felt like I was going to burst into tears but it didn't happen. Even though I

thought I couldn't run I managed to get a trot up for the last couple of hundred metres. After walking for 3hrs I managed to jog straight past my family without stopping, which I now regret. I guess I was so focussed on getting to the finish. After the event I was told they'd been waiting in the same spot for five hours without any food so some acknowledgement from me would have been good. I'll remember next time, just hopefully I've got no one on my hammer or the clock isn't ticking 9.14.41 as I enter the straight.

It was a long day and very surreal as it didn't feel like nearly 11 hours. Even my three hour walk after I'd ran my half marathon didn't feel long. I guess it was good constantly going in one direction and always getting closer to the finish line.

Run 4h46m03s 1234 out of 1852

Overall 10h39m45s 799 out of 1837

The learnings

It was a long way and I finished, however I don't want to do an IRONMAN™ just to finish. I want to be able to test myself and do my best so long as my best isn't half a swim and 40% of the run. Everyone is different and for me I must run every step of the way to successfully complete the event. In a way it was good I didn't nail the first one because it would have been a waste of time with less than half a swim.

I need to learn to swim. I don't need to be Kieran Perkins but I do need to pick up 10-15 mins so I'm not starting too far behind the eight ball. I also need to do some more races so I'm comfortable being bashed and handing out bashings in the swim.

For me I believe I have to do many more long days. Four hour training days are big for the man on the couch, but when your goal time is around 9hrs a four hour training day doesn't cut it. It's not for everyone but if I'm to perform to my limit, I think a need to put in some BIG days.

One of my toughest and most rewarding training days was a AM: 45km ride to work, Lunch: 5km run to the beach, 20min swim, 5km back to work and then a 100km ride home. The last 30kms of the second bike ride I was bugged. I only did this once but next time I'd hope to do a few more days like this as I reckon I'd turn up to the start line in much better shape.

I didn't do any threshold sessions on the bike or much work down on the aero bars so these will be a focus for the next IRONMAN™, which I've signed up for next year at Melbourne. To take care of this I'll hook up with PM's bike crew once a week when it gets light in the mornings again. I've also signed up as a member of [Southern Masters](#) bike club and hope to do races every three to four weeks.

The past few months have been spent in a good paddock. I've not worked on my swimming and have been sporadic on the run as I try to sort out my hamstring issues. I've been doing enough riding to stay generally fit but nothing huge. The plan is to get back into it on Sunday July 14, which is 252 days out from next year's Melbourne race.

Thanks for reading. Hopefully it's a much brighter tale next time I write an IRONMAN™ race report.

