



ROYAL AIR FORCE TRIATHLON ASSOCIATION

27 Apr 07

Race Report: Inter-Services Duathlon – 18 Apr 07 Thorney Island, Portsmouth

By Mick Pullin

The first race of the season is always exciting for many reasons - How has my training worked? How are my mates/competitors going? What new kit have The Lucky Ones purchased? etc etc.

And so it was that the Brampton/ Wyton/ Henlow Battle Bus headed south on the 4-hour journey to Thorney Island for the Inter-Services Duathlon. Things are not going well. I've had a good couple of days training but haven't tapered, so legs are feeling a little lethargic (although I didn't know this at the time (Excuse No 1)). The Sagster is late and I spill my coffee into my kit bag. We've arranged to pick up Karl Thompson en route at 0830. We are over an hour late. Despite this, Karl is in good spirits and we hire a crane to lift his bike into the back of the wagon and laugh at those strange things on his pedals. A quick call to The Antiques Road Show confirms that they are called toe clips.

The journey down is an opportunity to catch up with how people's winter training has gone. For some it has gone very well. For others, parts have gone well. And yet others have seen their winter training fragmented and unstructured. Eventually, we arrive at Thorney Island and unload the bikes and get our kit ready. We meet up with the other members of the RAF team and compare notes/ stories and generally catch up. A lot of the talk revolves around Ironman racing (and Ironman France in particular) and the new RAF Tri kit, in particular the shorts. Oh the shorts. Every time I pull them on I think of the Matt Lucas' "I'm the only gay in the village" character. The colours and design are superb, it's just that the shorts are...well...too short. It seems I am not alone in thinking this but it does cause a certain amount of merriment.

We get ourselves registered and out to the start line as the fearful time approaches. In fine Army tradition the start is delayed, but eventually we are gathered together and the hooter goes. The 2007 season is underway ... badly. Straight away, my legs feel heavy and I feel lethargic and lacking energy. A look over my shoulder confirms my worst fears - I (along with Phil McNeil) am Tail End Charlie. Looking ahead everyone seems to have quickly got into their running rhythms and are striding away effortlessly. Meanwhile, I'm feeling like an asthmatic sloth walking uphill carrying a particularly heavy bag of [pie!] shopping. After a mile or so my breathing settles down and I manage to overtake a couple of competitors, but it's a lonely existence at this end of the field and we're very strung out. At one point I look towards the sea where the leaders are silhouetted against the Solent - "sh!t, they're a long way ahead already" I think. Up ahead I can see a couple of RAF Tri members - the new kit really does stand out. Onto the runway and already I can see the leaders are heading back up the peri track on lap 1 of the bike, and yet, for me, transition is like a mirage in the desert, it's just not getting any closer. Slowly, painfully slowly, I creep up on transition and as I run in I am almost knocked sideways by some tumbleweed (I wasn't really, I was looking for a suitable metaphor to explain how empty transition was when I got there and that was the best I could come up with). A nice lady and I play the "after you", "no after you, I insist" game as we try to unrack our bikes but eventually I leave

T1, just as the race leader Tom Lowe comes steaming by to start lap 2. I've recounted on the forum already how I overtook Tom so won't repeat it here (but Debs, I accept that one Norman Stadler beats a Tom Lowe).

The bike, my bike, how I love my bike. Compared to the first run I am now in Heaven. Yes, I have spent a lot of time since the New Year on the bike doing punishing turbo sessions and long rides with The Sagster and Iron Bally, and now was the time to see if it would pay off. The first thing I noticed was the wind; although it seemed fairly mild when standing on the runway when you start riding it really was quite noticeable. I quickly started overtaking people, some without realising it (I spent 3 laps looking for Chairman Pete thinking "surely he can't STILL be ahead of me" - he wasn't!). I tried to offer words of encouragement to people I recognised but, to be honest, for most of the time I was working hard. With a tailwind on the runway, it was relatively easy to reach 30+mph, even though it was relatively flat. At the end of lap 3 (or was it lap 4?), I saw 2 familiar figures - Tinman and RoyB. I have absolutely no idea what they were doing but it looked like they were out on some sort of afternoon training ride rather than racing. They were riding side-by-side a drafting friendly 2 metres or so apart, and with a little effort I sped between them offering words of encouragement as I went. I seem to recall some words of thanks being shouted back at me, but the airstream prevented me from fully appreciating them. I started to pay the price for my earlier exertions at the beginning of lap 5 and I started to feel my hamstrings tighten and the old familiar twinges of cramp beginning. I slowed and tried to stretch them by dropping the ankles but I knew it was going to be painful come T2. I didn't realise just how much I had slowed down until Tinman came back past me - this was turning into a REALLY bad day. Approaching T2 and I slipped out of my shoes and prepared to dismount.

Off the bike and the anticipated cramp came - both calves and hamstrings at the same time - ouch! I manage to rack my bike, swap shoes and shuffle out of T2 like an old man (ok, a much older man). Up ahead is Nige Porter, Tin Man passes me on my right and then RoyB taps me on the shoulder and repays my early kind words of encouragement with some kind words of his own. That's what I like about racing for the RAF - the camaraderie and mutual support. I can honestly say that I have never felt so bad in a race before [*due to the cramp, team spirit, or just the delights of racing?!*]. People were overtaking me left and right and I had absolutely nothing to offer. Russ Watson, Karl Thompson and finally, on the run to the line, Vicky Webb all came past me. I was so, so glad to finish. It was a bad race and I was happy it was over, but we all have bad races every now and then. I spoke with Karl on the bus home to discuss how I could attack my run shortcomings and I now have 3 weeks to try and get it sorted before the RAF Sprint Champs at Cranwell. I've made large gains in swimming and cycling this winter; it would be a shame if I blew it by being a complete donkey on the run.

See you all at Cranwell.

[A great report. Come on then Tinman, let's have your view... Put your pencil where your....]

