

Halesowen Triathlon 7th April 2013 - Paul Butler (Male Super Veteran)



As I embark on my Ironman racing year and recovering from a severe dose of man-flu the previous week, I find myself setting up transition in near arctic temperatures (oh alright it had warmed up to 4 Deg C) at Halesowen Leisure Centre. I was almost ready for the off of my first Triathlon of the year, the Halesowen Sprint Tri, 400m pool swim, 20k bike (oh yeh? More about this later) and a 5k run.

Reading details on the website the bike was a challenging undulating course over the Clent hills, followed by a 'flattish' run. The words challenging, undulating and flattish did give some initial cause for concern!

Well my start time of 9:42 fast approached and I made my way from transition to the side of the pool where I was given my timing strap which was to be located just below my inked on race number '101' and I was told to take up my position at the end of my lane. With 50 seconds to go I was allowed to get into the water, I casually lowered myself in and let go thinking that I would touch the bottom, except I was in the deep end about 14 feet, so without taking a breath I sank to the bottom rising to the surface coughing and spluttering to hear the lane judge say 'go!'

I hit the start button on my new Garmin 910XT, wrong button it turned out but hey I was still trying to empty my lungs of water, and off I set on my first length. I quickly settled into my now perfected free style and started to eat up the metres and I was flying or at least well that's what I thought but everyone else seemed to be going a lot faster, must have been the drag from the Garmin 910XT!

The 12 lengths of the 33m pool seemed to go effortlessly and I was delighted with my time, just under 8 minutes, a PB in a race for me, so with much pride I climbed out of the pool collected my towel ran out of the door and before I knew it I was bouncing down a flight of stairs and landing in a heap at the bottom! "I told you to hold onto the rail" came the helpful comment from the stairway marshal, "I didn't hear you obviously" was my polite reply (or words to that effect). It took me a while to get my breath back again (and only been racing for 8 minutes), and I gingerly hobbled down the next flight of steps, holding onto the rail for dear life to emerge in the transition area 2 minutes later decimating my recorded swim time (now a very slow 9mins 42 seconds).

Was I going to quit just because I had fallen down a flight of stairs, no us triathletes are made of sterner stuff (oh alright I had paid £33 to enter and there was no way I was wasting that amount of money!). I hobbled to my bike and put on several layers of clothing, and set off on the bike.

I was now looking forward to the challenging and undulating course ahead of me without any knowledge of just how hilly the Clent Hills are (I guess the clue is in the name!) All I know is that between mile 4 and mile 10 it was uphill with very little downhill recovery so by mile 10 my thighs were burning but at least I hadn't had to go onto the small ring and granny gear (triathletes don't use the granny gears!) Just as I thought I had got to the top of the climb I turned the corner to see something reminiscent of a ski jump and I was at the bottom! Well there was no way I was going to get beaten by this so off I set, half way up I forgot the pride and I was into the small ring and granny gear, standing up out of the saddle and climbing at 4 mph (yes I could have run up faster!) Towards the top of the hill I could then see photographer ready to take my photo and very helpfully saying "there is a man walking his dog catching you up"yes very helpful but I continued to smile through gritted teeth as triathletes don't show any pain!

The top of the hill eventually came and I then proceeded to hurtle down the other side, I was gripping both brakes as hard as I could and I was still descending at 33mph. I was then overtaken by a maniac on a TT bike down on the tri bars doing around 45-50mph (I am not that 'serious' a triathlete so I just accepted that his £4000 bike was just faster than mine and got on with it).

I looked down at my speedo to see that I had now done 19km and so must be near the finish or not as it turned out! The bike section was actually 24 km and not the advertised 20km and so I had to grit my teeth once again up the last climb to transition and eventually crossed the timing mat after a tortuous 54 minutes at an average speed of just under 16mph, slow you may think but having seen the amount climb on my Garmin statistics I am actually quite pleased with that.

So into Transition 2, or T2 as us triathletes call it (why would you waste time saying transition?) and very quickly off the bike, changing shoes, removing layers, gloves and helmet and off onto the 'flattish' run. My legs seemed to be moving through treacle but I was moving at a slow but respectable 8.5 mins/mile and headed across the road, through an underpass and into a hilly/muddy field! This was not my idea of flattish but hey we are triathletes and nothing puts us off so once again through gritted teeth I set off up the hill smiling at and encouraging everyone coming back the other way on the return on the 'out and back course'. They seemed to be flying down the hill and this did give me a boost as I was flagging as I approached the top of the hill.

Before I knew it I had reached the turn point and was off at an increased pace retracing my steps to the finish. I was now meeting other runners climbing the hill as I was sprinting down it (well I was going down faster than I had climbed) and the pain of falling down the steps, biking up what seemed like Mount Kilimanjaro and running up and down a muddy hill (that's why I don't do cross-country!) all but disappeared.

The finish now in sight, so normal routine, breath in, chest out, start to sprint and smile as if this was a stroll in the park. To the cheers of the masses I crossed the line and stopped my Garmin at a total time of 1 hour 26 minutes, my slowest and by a long way the hardest triathlon I have completed! It was then that the pain in my leg, wrist and worst of all right buttock from the fall hit me and I hobbled to collect my tee-shirt, bananas and bottle of water. The black tee-shirt with luminous green text said "Halesowen Triathlon, it ain't easy but who wants easy?"

Well a couple of days on as I am writing my first tri blog, sitting very uncomfortably on a very bruised and sore right buttock what are my thoughts on doing it again? Well hell yeh! Bring on the next one, Stratford Triathlon in May, a fast and flat course now that's more like it!