

3D CHALLENGE

EDITORIAL: JEREMY CRONIN

As a fierce weather bomb swept across the country, highly tuned athletes who had travelled from far and wide turned their focus onto whether mother-nature, unleashing her fearful powers, would rest long enough to allow the super performers through her gates. Water fell in abundance from the black sky, the wind farms were spinning fast and the ground was struggling to keep its head above water. Yet kayaks rolled into town illustrating the typical adventurers' courage and style. Mountain bikes were tied down tight and the portable sporting workshops held some very fit and fierce competitors who were parked up for registration.

Gortex jackets rustled through a crowd of excited, pumped-up, endurance adrenalin junkies. Amongst the best of the chiselled pros, this is a once in a life time opportunity for novices to stand at the 'start line' with the world's greatest athletes. Anticipation and apprehension abound as the morning's secrets reveal what the day shall be. The questions begin- will I wear thermal leggings, should I wear a jacket or arm warmers, would a dry jacket be better in the kayak or shall I tough it out, will I use my ski or my multi-sport kayak, how much will this wet weather slow me down, will this weather report be right for once? You check the gear you that you thought you had arranged in precise order and then you turn in for what could be either a very long, or not long enough time in the sack.

I had stumbled across this event while searching for the best races to add to my race calendar for the season. I then heard on the grapevine about the 3D Challenge and the next minute everyone and anyone was talking about it. I researched further and learnt that a Coast to Coast champion as well as a world class endurance racer would be participating. I found out that the sponsors involved promote and provide the best gear you can be using and the course, itself, is world class in its own right. This had the recipe for "a must do event" that could provide an amazing experience. I was not to be let down!

Athletes from all over the globe marvelled at the time, thought and energy of many kiwis who had crossed 'T's' and dotting 'I's' to ensure this optimal race experience. The event provided the opportunity to choose from an array of courses and disciplines that were all so appealing that it made it hard to choose just one. Events included; 8km paddle, 10.5km walk & run, half marathon walk & run, 42km duathlon, 25km grassroots multisport challenge (incorporating the 2011 secondary school multisport championships), 50km premier multisport title race (incorporating the 2011 Australasian multisport championships).

My pick was the 50km Premier Multisport Title Race. I figured I had chosen the best- I would get to try it all; kayak, mountain bike and trail run, as well as line up next to my sporting role models and heroes on the start line. Overall a very achievable choice; long enough to be challenged but not so long that I had to take a year from work and focus day in and out on that one race. Each leg was to challenge the competitor and their level of experience- this sounded the perfect option for me... Preparation being a key to success- I was ready to tango with mother nature, though I did not intend standing on her toes! I would do my best to work with what she delivered, I thought, as big gusty winds whistled through the gaps in the windows. I fell asleep dreaming of the start line.





PREVIOUS PAGE: GETTING A GOOD START ON THE RUNNING LEG | THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT: JEREMY ON THE 30KM MOUNTAIN BIKE LEG, THE 8 KM PADDLE IN CLASSIC NZ CONDITIONS, AT THE FINISH LINE ALL SMILES!

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I was awoken with a start by the alarm, my heart thudding loudly in my ears, a loud message in my head- “Race Day”. Because sleep deprivation is part of the life of an endurance athlete and the half sombre state you wake in is all too familiar, I am lucky to be trained and tuned enough that it only takes a splash of cold water across the face to spark action. Pre race excitement hurries me to the curtains for a glimpse of the day and as I pulled them wide open I found calm after the storm - the prayers of 500 athletes answered.

Pre race organisation and super-organisation transforms me into ‘Lycra-man’ much like Clark Kent turns to ‘Batman’. The hardest part of the day finds me battling to digest my 12 Weetbix followed by cream rice and a banana. I rise to the challenge and slide out the door, wagon packed, kayak on, bike lashed down, favourite c.d. blaring - I am into it.

There does not seem to be a breath of air as I examine the lake and what is happening on the water; geese swim calm and competitors gather like kids before an exam, some ready and rearing, some nervous and others thinking a few more training days might have been useful. Off to transition number two and three where I hung my bike on the racks and settled my running shoes the right way around for the final leg. I am now ready to race and focus my thoughts on the start line.

Sitting in my kayak on the shore line, I watch a line form on the start that was not budging. Participants were set in their place and adamant that was their spot. A warm up paddle and a few stretches go down a treat as the call rang out for two minutes till start. My plan was working well and I was in for a moving start, I could see a gap in the start line ahead that I would aim for and hit as the gun sounded. Boom, to perfection we were gone and I was in the spot, slip lined and settled from the get go.

It is not hard to paddle 8km when the surroundings are so surreal; classic NZ hills that look like a green cloth has been thrown down, native trees that seem to be symmetrically organised and standing tall tower over you in points, fresh clean water that is split like a knife as the hull of each kayak slices through and the classic kiwi local cheering for your efforts. Into a slick transition and off I go onto the 30km mountain bike.

The one suggestion I would make for this race is to train well for the bike leg, get into the Redwoods and be marvelled by their glory, feel what it is like to climb to the top in the appropriate gear and then enjoy the wind on your face as you come screaming down. The tracks are so well marked out on race day, that taking the wrong turn is not an option; they have been chosen to cater for all levels and abilities. It is not a scarily hard ride (unless your brakes snap and you are in for the free fall descent), it is enjoyable and flows better than every race track I have ever been on. Toward the end of the bike the playful jumps and drops, I could not resist, were taking a toll on my back and I was ready to upgrade to a dual suspension bike. However the

cheaper option saw me through to the finish where I transformed into my running shoes.

As well as the long hours that organisers spent ensuring that this race ran smoothly, a massive thanks goes out to the volunteers, always smiling and cheering you on. They indicated the direction we were heading and this lead me through another slick bike - run transition and onto the final 12km trail run.

Flat ground underfoot for a few 100meters and then into the climb, I ensured that my heart rate remained steady and put one foot in front of the other! I did not allow the hill to burn my mind just my legs and then all of a sudden I reached the top. Following a fast descent and a few undulating trail segments the first 6km loop was done, to my surprise. It felt like I was running on a supported cloud; the flora and fauna from the forest creates a sponge-like ground where there is little impact and you are free to go for gold. Round two and the hill was still there- I find that maintaining a focus on the present and not fixating on the top works for me. Up you go-and all of a sudden you are coming down the hill again and heading for the home strait.

As I came to the realisation that I could hear the sound of the party at the finish line, I reflected on how good I was feeling- not bruised and battered at all. Suddenly the finishing shoot appeared and I was running towards the crowd that stood to cheer us through the golden gates and offer us a cold drink and a massage. I reflected on how smoothly it had gone and how amazing the course was, and crazily I actually felt a little sad it was over as I enjoyed myself so much out there.

I stood proudly with the rest of the competitors who were buzzing and together we soaked up the atmosphere; the music, the sponsors, the big tent in amongst the Redwoods, the pro’s being interviewed and the organisers and volunteers all smiling. A great motivation for participating in this kind of event is the sense of being united with fit healthy athletes that share the same passion for life and adventure.

Prize-giving was the best I have ever been to, or even heard of; the speakers/MC were awesome, the prize list makes the king Kong look small -from stand up paddle boards, numerous kayaks, running shoes, watches, roof racks - you name it and it was there!

This was one truly incredible race - an absolute must to do, both the ‘Ozys’ and the Kiwis loved it and were not let down. While I look forward to next year, I am going to do it again with friends before then. Congratulations 3D on one of the best events on the list of some outstanding races we have all competed in, and after its first successful year, I cannot wait for your second birthday next year.

If this race sounds like a bit of you and you are interested in going through the course you can find me at www.jeremycronin.com and I would be happy to guide you through the amazing scenery and trails this race follows. I look forward to hearing from you or seeing you next year at 3D.