

TIM CHURCHILL'S RACE REPORT – DORNEY LAKES, SEP'11

Pre Event

Where to begin? I started my journey(yes I'm going to use cliché's!) about 18 months ago with a view to getting fitter and losing some weight. I was starting at some 24 stone! Although a big chap I have always been what I considered 'active' covering around 1500 miles a year on a bike and having a fairly physical job. I decided that to succeed with my goals of weight loss and increased fitness I would need a series of goals. My chosen goals were basically a 100km ride, a 100mile ride, 2500miles for the year and get to 18st by my 30th birthday which was back in April. To date I have managed all bar the 100mile ride.

Around my birthday I decided that running would not be a bad thing to also give a go on top of the cycling and set about working my way through a 'couch to 5K' training program. I managed around 3 weeks of the program before deciding it was a bit 'easy' and just stepped up to just running(well more a jog but you get the idea) as the fitness to do it was there it was just the body getting used to the pounding that took the time. Before long I was running for 30-40 minutes loving it.

A colleague of mine is a long time Triathlete and over the year I have listened to him talk about them and I have always thought i'd love a go at that. Now I was running and cycling it seemed about time for me to give one a go as the years goals were falling fast I needed something new to aim for. So it was decided to pick an event late in the summer to give me a fair chance of completing without needing to drag myself over the finish line. So I picked the USN Dorney Lake Triathlon in September.

So training was typically all over the place from this point with me trying to mix training 3 disciplines into the hectic life of someone working shifts who lives out a suitcase around 4 days a week! Suffice to say some weeks were 15 hour training weeks and others were lucky to make 5.

Right up until the middle of august I still had one hurdle to overcome. I knew I could cover the distances fine even doing some decent length brick session from the bike to running however I had still yet to try open water swimming. Michelle had kindly offered for me to come along to one of Jetstreams sessions to have a go but living 100miles away from your Tri club makes that very tricky so I opted to give it a go in my local OW lake near Great Yarmouth. It was a very eye opening experience and made me realise there was more to it than just swimming in a straight line from buoy to buoy. For a start straight lines are really quite tricky things to do when you don't have a black line in the bottom of the pool to follow. Secondly swimming in a wetsuit is something very different to pool swimming! You are amazingly buoyant and you just seem to glide along effortlessly.

1 week prior to The Dorney lake Tri I went OW swimming again but this time I suffered my first set back. I was around 3/4 of the way round the 750m loop when I started feeling dizzy and sick. I tried plodding on hoping it would pass but every time I turned my head to breath it got worse. I called it a day and started worrying but vowing not to give up. I'd been fine before so I must have just been having a bad day. I tried again the weekend before my triathlon and fortunately I was fine managing to complete the 1500m in one go with no problems.

So I was all set for my big day.

Race day

Up until this day the most athletic thing I had ever undertaken was the london to brighton cycle ride a couple of times with mates stopping at every single aid station taking advantage of the free food!

So the alarm was set for 4am as registration opened at 6.15am and I wanted to get there in plenty of time. It is fair to say I managed that as I slept very little and eventually had got the car packed along with my morning porridge eaten by about 4.30am with a 30 min drive to get there!

After wasting as much time as I could I eventually sat in the cap park alone in the dark for a good 25 mins before anyone turned up. I signed myself on getting everything I needed and went over to transition. If you are reading this as a beginner like I am I can strongly recommend checking out the Youtube videos about setting up your transition area. Being the first into transition allowed me to set myself up on the end of the row assigned for wave 1 so finding my stuff would be a piece of cake. I then familiarised myself with the layout of the Transition area noting the bike in and out and run out route along with the mount and dismount lines.

So after wasting another hour or so I got myself into my wetsuit and said my goodbyes to my parents who had come to watch me.

After a quick briefing about how the start would be done and to make sure we knew it was a non drafting event we entered the water and I did my best to acclimatise myself with the water which was not at all warm! I got myself into an area of space off to one side to try and avoid the bashing I would get from being in the main pack.

BANG!

I was off! Months of training had led up to this point and it was now time to make it count.

I swam strongly for the first 50m or so to make sure I was in space and then settled into a nice steady rhythm. I have found I swim in a relatively straight line in open water so I knew I should be fine but it turned out I need not have worried as Dorney lake being a rowing venue has lane buoys long the loop which are connected by a single rope about 1.5m below the surface along the full lake length. This meant I could just follow it like you would a swimming pool. Eventually I made it to the first turn buoy and I ended up part of a group but they swam away from me when I turned the second mark to head back to the start.

By lap 2 I had finally found some feet to swim with but I found when in the draft I just was swimming to slow and when out of the draft I could not get past so I just moved off to the side of him and swam alongside him for the duration of the second lap.

Sighting the 'swim out' area was difficult as it was directly into the early morning sun however as I got within about 200m of it I could see it so started sighting for it while kicking to try and get some blood back in my legs for when it was time to stand up out the water!

So 'swim out' was reached and up I stood. Fortunately I think there was just enough blood in my legs for them to work! So trying to look as professional as I was capable I jogged over to my bike while unzipping my wetsuit and getting it down to my waist.

Top Tip - Take you swim hat and goggles off and keep hold when you pull your wetsuit off you will find they get held by the inside out sleeve of the wetsuit saving you having to stash them in transition.

T1 was uneventful just taking my time to get my gel's in my pocket along with getting my socks and shoes on.

I staggered over to the mount line with my bike and prepared to get on the bike while still feeling semi dizzy! Not a nice feeling but I guess one you have to get used to!

So off I went on the bike narrowly avoiding hitting a crash barrier as I had a dizzy-ness induced wobble.

The bike was a simple flat 8 lap affair around the lake that was allegedly very fast but 9 times out of 10 it is windy so you have an exposed headwind to contend with on at least 1 of the lakes sides on each lap. I knew

the bike was my strong point and I was aiming to have it done in 80 mins giving me a 20mph average and then hopefully somehow holding on to my will to survive long enough to run 10k.

Everyone who I knew from the triathlon world advised taking it easy on the bike as the run is where triathlons are won and lost but with a best standalone 10k time of a mere 54mins in training I knew there was more to gain from riding fairly hard, over taking it easy and having more energy on the run(Or so I thought!).

So the laps were ticked off with my cable tie counting system on the stem of my bike but as the laps went on the wind got stronger and stronger meaning the return leg to transition was getting harder and harder to contend with. A friend of mine had done the triathlon in July at the same venue and had advised me that if it was windy to take it easy on the tailwind legs and push on the headwind legs. So I did, the tailwind legs were cruised at a steady 24mph and the headwind legs were fought hard to get 18mph!

The final lap came and I made a point of spinning the legs more than usual to get them ready for the run along with taking it easier on the final headwind leg and into transition. I dismounted at the line and jogged in my shoes to my transition area. The bike was racked, helmet off and shoes were swapped with the aid of elastic laces. I was out of T2 in around a minute I thought.

So onto the run course I went. This was a simple out and back 4 times run which was as boring as you can imagine but provided a nice area for my parents to see me running for the first time!

In my previous bike to run brick sessions I have found myself running off the bike with a surprising spring in my step but I always go off way to fast leaving me a puffing wreck in no time at all so I studied my Garmin more than I should have to make sure I ran from the word go at a pace I hoped I could sustain. This proved to be a bit beyond even me though and I found myself watching my heart rate sitting around 175bpm at a pace which which would normally see it at 150bpm!

So I backed off a bit which saw it drop to 170bpm. If i ran any slower though I would be walking so just had to get on with it.

Lap 1 was completed and I grabbed a cup of water trying to drink it while running. This didn't work so I decided to walk the water station each lap to give a small rest and to allow me to get some fluid on board as I figured I would be a bit dehydrated after only having a 750ml of energy drink and 2 gels on the bike.

Running was getting harder and harder with each turning point and my legs were starting to really hurt but seeing everyone else running and not walking made me keep going regardless. As I passed the water station each time I saw my dad with a massive smile on his face and on lap 3 I said to him 'One more' and he laughed at my exhausted expression on my face!

On the last lap I knew in my mind walking would not be acceptable even though thats all I wanted to do so I plodded on to the far turn point which just seemed to get further away every lap. As I turned round the cone I said thanks to the marshall and knew I was on the home stretch.

This was it the culmination of 18 months hard work just 1250 metres away. I had a fellow competitor come past me slowly so I decided to tag onto him and let him drag me home, however I knew if I didn't cross the line barely able to stand I would know I had more to give and could have gone faster so I opened out my stride and ran past him with about 750 metres to go. I finally turned up the finish chute and ran for all I was worth crossing the line just behind someone who pipped me with 20m to go!

After having my timing chip removed and getting my goody bag I found a patch of grass and pretty much collapsed on the floor satisfied that I could not have done much more.

My dad came over and I asked what the time was, 'About 11.25' he said! Starting at 8.30am meant I knew i'd got under my target time of 3 hours but I need to know by how much.

After regaining some control of my exhausted body I went over to the timing screen and checked my number.....2 hours 47 mins 01 seconds! Astounded doesn't even begin to describe feelings at that moment! Not only had I beaten my aim but I had smashed it!

To anyone reading this thinking they would like to give it a go I would say go for it however be under no illusions as to how damn hard it is! My training included bike rides over 4 hours and they were a walk in the park compared to 2hr47mins of this!

Final splits were

Swim - 32.16
T1 - 2.21
Bike - 1.13.48
T2 - 0.55
Run - 57.39

Roll on 2012!!!