

Even in these days of ever more extreme athletic achievement the merest mention of an Ironman triathlon still commands an enormous amount of respect and trepidation. There is an argument that it's the greatest test of sporting skill there is, with the different requirements of swimming, cycling and running combining with terrific levels of stamina and an ability to race others in one continuous event. Stratford Athletics Club's Wayne Vickers recently achieved this outstanding milestone at the Ironman UK event down at Sherborne in Dorset, completing the 2.4-mile open-water swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile run in a staggering 11 hours 22:28 minutes. This placed him an impressive 239th out of 1,038 finishers, coming 62nd out of 264 in the male 35-39 age category, with split times of a 1 hour 12:31 minutes swim, 6 hours 23:25 minutes cycle and a 3 hours 34:16 minute marathon. As Wayne also raised £3000 for McMillan Cancer Relief and the official Rotary charities this made the creation of Stratford AC's first Ironman since the halcyon days of Stuart Curtis and Craig Evans even more worthwhile.

What probably makes this effort even more remarkable is, as anyone who knows the area around Sherborne Castle will know, that the bike and run routes are very hilly, pushing already tired bodies over the limit. After a 3:30 a.m. breakfast Wayne lined up alongside the rest of the field in the lake next to the castle for the 6 a.m. swim – not a bad effort for someone who struggled to do 2-lengths freestyle 3 years ago. From getting out of the lake competitors then have a most untriathlon-like transition, in Wayne's case 6 minutes, as a complete dry-off and change of clothes is required for a 112-mile bike ride! The 3-lap cycle route to Dorchester and back contained many hills but Wayne's strength took him through the field from 550th to 390th, and this was then followed by another 6-minute transition before setting off on the run. The overtaking continued as he kept to consistent 8-minute miling all the way, good enough to place him a magnificent 60th on the run, despite more strength-sapping hills before the downhill of the last 5-miles worked away at his quads. As tiredness set in Wayne misread his mile split times for his total time, and since they were creeping up towards the 11 mark he was extremely surprised when he crossed the line to realise that he was well inside his pre-race aim of 12 hours! Wayne could then recover and watch as the rest of the field came in, some in the dark and struggling to beat the 17-hour cut off point, although even he had to wonder how respective winners Frank Heldoorn (Holland) and Dede Griesbauer (USA) could possibly achieve their times of 8:36:38 and 9:37:45. As Wayne gets his life back together after this epic achievement it will be interesting to see what challenges lie ahead.

The somewhat more reasonable distances of 400m swim, 22K bike and 5K run saw Stratford AC's Yvonne Caswell perform admirably at the 4th Malmesbury Sprint Triathlon in North Wiltshire. The event saw the finale of Yvonne's season; one which has seen the Shipston mother of three compete in her first 2 Olympic distance races and work especially hard on improving her cycling. Her fine time of 1 hour 6:09 minutes saw her placed 57th out of the 164 finishers, which contained a 6:29 swim, 35:04 bike and 24:36 run. Yvonne was 6th lady overall and this could have been even higher if she hadn't, rather oddly, been put in a swim lane with much slower swimmers.

Two more members of Stratford AC's active triathlete group took part in an Olympic distance event over at Bedford on the same day. Pete Evans and Keith Hawkes set off together in the final swim wave in the River Ouse through the centre of the town, and Pete's excellent cycling again ensured that he had a fine result. Conditions started off perfectly calm but by the end of the 40K bike leg the breeze had started to gust somewhat, although this wasn't really much of a disadvantage as the competitors negotiated the 3-lap 10K run round Bedford's pleasant Embankment and parks. Pete's 2-week holiday ensured that he had fresh legs for the cycle, but were a bit out of practice for the run, and his overall time was 2 hours 24:11 minutes (30:17 swim, 67:03 bike, 46:51 run). This placed him 98th out of the 320 finishers, and 19th out of 62 in his male 35-39 group. Keith finished 111th overall, and 12th out of 54 in the 40-44 age category, in 2:26:14 with split times of 25:44 swim, 76:43 bike and 43:46 run.