

The summer has, as always, been a hectic time for the highly enthusiastic triathletes of Stratford AC, and whilst most of their endeavours have been over vaguely sensible distances some of course have to go one (or two) stages further! Out of the four standard triathlon distances long (or ironman) is the most brutal, with middle-distance not far behind, and a number of club members have been taking up these gruelling challenges.

Wayne Vickers is one of those weird people that never seem to run out of energy, never seem to get injured and never seem to know when enough is enough! After his successful long-distance tri debut at Ironman UK a couple of years ago Wayne has been itching to have another go, and so when the chance came to compete at Frankfurt he jumped at the chance.

A very warm German weekend greeted our boy, and as he racked his bike at the lake the night before it was still 32C degrees! The worrying thing was that with a good water temperature it was only 0.5 degrees away from a wetsuit ban, and removing that extra buoyancy in a mass start of 2,600 could have made things quite difficult.

Wayne had a poor start to the 3.8K swim as he hung back too much, worrying about the number of people, meaning that he then struggled to get past this mass of bodies. At least after 400m of being battered and bruised he managed to settle into a rhythm, although his 72-minute (41 / 31 minute laps tell their own story) swim split was the same as his Sherbourne one, which was slightly disappointing after all his swim training. A 7-minute transition followed, with too much messing about with suncream and socks, but he then set off for a fantastic bike leg.

The fairly flat and fast 180K course contained 3 big hills (one of them cobbled), and an average speed of 20:2mph on the first lap made Wayne realise that he was looking at a cycle split of around 5 hours 40. Needing lots of water, bars and gels because of the heat, he managed to keep the pace up on 2nd lap and finished in 5 hours 38, which was way beyond his top expectations. A much better second transition of 3 minutes set him up well for the 42K marathon run, which was 4 laps around the river in Frankfurt city centre, although by this time it was well into the afternoon and scorching.

With the help of iced water and a constant supply of gels Wayne's run splits were pretty constant, and other than getting cramp a couple of times trying to re-tie shoelaces he ran superbly to constantly overtake, gaining about 500 places on the 3 hour 29:52 run! A grandstand finish in the main square in Frankfurt, and an unbelievable overall time of 10 hours 30:53 minutes (513th male out of the 2,060 who finished), meant that it was one very happy Stratford member crossing the finish line!

Steve Kirk warmed up for his Ironman debut in October (at Challenge Barcelona) with an impressive showing over in Wales at the Bala Middle-Distance Triathlon. On a glorious day in North Wales, the Tiddington terrier was amongst some 530 entrants, which included some of Britain's finest endurance athletes because the event incorporated both the British and Welsh Championships.

By time it all kicked off a brisk breeze was raising a few waves on the water, meaning that even the 1.9K swim would be a bit hilly, which at least got everyone used to the joys of the challenging but beautifully scenic 90K bike leg to follow. After a terrific swim (37:38) Steve displayed his usual steely discipline by not pushing too hard on the bike, and so leaving something in his legs for the run, but he still recorded a pleasing 2:46:52 cycle. The first part of the half-marathon run was fine, but around the halfway point of the route there was a steep hill at which point it all started to go wrong. Steve felt all the energy drain out of his legs, and the remaining 6 or 7 miles had to be negotiated with a jog / run strategy for a final split of 1-hour 57:16; still good enough to finish a very respectable 274th. As frustrating as this was – his overall

time of 5-hours 25:20 was looking to be at least 10 minutes quicker for most of the race –Steve at least now knows what happens to his body when there are only energy drinks and no food stations out on the course. This knowledge will be of enormous benefit when he heads off to Spain for double the distance.

Pete Evans has had an injury and illness-hit year, but despite that his class still seems to shine through every time he competes. His middle-distance debut was at the Ironman 70.3 UK version, at Wimbleball on the Exmoor National Park, and it was only after he entered that he found out it was reputed to be the toughest one in the world of this middle-distance series! A combination of 2000m of climbing on the bike (52 hills in 56 miles), 950m of climbing on the run and 1000 people all swimming together, and a disrupted training 2009 schedule, meant that Pete was fairly cautious going into this very challenging event.

Consequently he kept well out of the way at the start of the 1.9K swim, had an excellent split (34:56) and started off well on his strong suit – the 90K bike leg. In keeping with the rest of the year he got a puncture on lap 1, fixed that with some tyre sealant, but then promptly punctured again on lap 2. After fixing that Pete realised that the tyre was damaged, changed the tubular tyre and in all lost 18 minutes as he finished this eventful trip in 3 hours 19:45.

The temptation to throw the toys out of the pram and go home was just about resisted in T2, and he continued to finish off with a surprisingly quick 1-hour 47:11 half-marathon. The frustrations were obvious though as Pete realised that he had missed the last slot in his age group for the World 70.3 Championships (in Florida) by 14 minutes – much less than his bike adventures cost him. Amongst a high-class field he finished 212th overall and 33rd in his age group. So even in this injury and illness strewn half-season Pete has decided against going to Australia for the Sprint Worlds, but will now take on the cream of the duathlon (run-bike-run) scene at their World Championships in North Caroline (USA) in September instead.

The common theme amongst this trio of quality endurance triathletes, apart from remarkable stamina and no little talent, are extremely understanding wives, and the current Mrs Vickers has given Wayne permission to enter Ironman UK again next year!

Everyone at the running club was greatly shocked and saddened to hear of the sudden death of Ray Ziel – an ex-member of the club, and a true legend of the local sporting scene.