



Race Report



World Long Distance Championships Andrew Eldridge – 1st Paratri 4

Race Report LD World Championship – Andrew Eldridge

To say I was under-prepared for this race is an understatement. Work had been quite demanding and combined with my many other commitments, my training had been

compromised. My heart sank little by little as I watch the forecast of strong easterlies and 30 plus degrees turn into a reality on race day.

At least the water was cool. As I swam to the start there were a number of elite competitors already warming up between the stairs and the start line. “Didn’t these people listen to the briefing?” I thought, but then I realised none of them were at the briefing. Bob Thomas was running a little late and as he made his way to the start I saw the imminent collision, but there was nothing I could do to stop it. Bob didn’t make a fuss – there wasn’t time anyway – it wasn’t until the end of the race that I saw his banged-up lip and missing teeth. The hooter went and we were off.

I was very conscious of having to maintain a sensible pace, to make the distance and not overheat. Underwater visibility was nil, but the buoys seemed to be coming straight, and once I realised the channel posts were parallel to the course, I relaxed and settled in for the swim. I seemed to be making surprisingly good speed in the early stages, but getting a clear breath was difficult in the chop, and every now and then I would cop a wave in the ear, leaving my ear ringing. About 1 km into the swim the first of the elites roared past. Finally Heirisson Island seemed to be within reach, but the wind was now howling down the north channel. The last 200m to the turning buoy was a massive struggle. I could feel my energy reserves being sapped but I couldn’t afford to ease off or I would be blown backwards. Eventually I made the turn, fully expecting it to be an easy swim home, but alas, it wasn’t to be. The waves now seemed to be overtaking me, and I wallowed from one crest to another, trying to get some balance and rhythm. The current seemed to be running against me! The buildings on the terrace were moving past at a glacial pace. There was Plain St, there was the Hyatt, there was my apartment, there was the ABC building – why was it taking so long!/? I stopped to adjust my goggles – actually, I stopped because I needed a rest. My feet touched the bottom – maybe I could walk for a bit? By now the age groupers were roaring past. My shoulder was hurting, and my kick felt powerless – I was starting to wish I’d done some longer, higher-intensity training! Needless to say, by the time I climbed the stairs, I was almost done in. I walked through the chute, unable to raise a jog.

At the tent, I discovered Bob was still in the water, which proved one thing – I had done a reasonable swim time. I was borderline cramping as I put my bike shoes on - I knew right away I was going to have to ride easy for the first 30 minutes at least. In T1 I heard someone yell to another competitor “ride like there’s no run” – I was planning the opposite strategy – to give away some time on the bike and hopefully get it back on the run. I set a steady pace on the bike, cruising on the downwind sections and limiting my effort into the wind. After about 40km I started to feel confident that I was rehydrated and cramp-free and began to work a bit harder, all the while looking after my run legs.

By the time I hit the run course the temperature was above 30 and what little wind there was, had no cooling effect. There was very little left in the tank. I think I ran about 7km before I had to take an extended walk – my internal body temperature was high, and in spite of taking all the ice I could get, I was feeling dizzy and fatigued – a sensation I knew from a previous case of heat stroke. I was physically capable of running faster but I

couldn't do it without getting hotter. I wished I'd trained a little harder in some warmer conditions. The rest of the run was an ugly combination of about 50% walking and 50% running, but eventually the finish line loomed large and I managed a pathetic run to the end.

What did I learn from this race? First and foremost, apply sunscreen inside those sections of race suit that move during the race, and reapply sunscreen after the swim! I think I've peeled at least 3 times in some places. Next time I'll also try to do a better job preparing for the worst case weather scenario. Mine was a measured performance, knowing I had only to finish to make it on the podium, but even so, it was one of the hardest races I've ever done. Well done to those who competed!