



Race Report – Ironman Western Australia 2009
By Bradley Hosking
(8th Place Overall & 1st Age Grouper across the line)



“Standing there in the water, the steady quickening of blood pulsing in my ears, I closed my eyes and prayed for strength in all its forms. Slowly opening my eyes, I breathed one last deep breath and mouthed in quiet determination...Earn this!”

THE JOURNEY

From the seven IM medals I have been privileged to hang on my wall to date, this one has been the most satisfying and personally rewarding of them all. Many demons were fought on the journey to the start line, including once again – injury and I don't need to tell anyone who was out there on the day, the conditions that needed to be endured during the run to reach that finish line in tact.

After a campaign that would span six months, including two World Championships (Gold Coast & Perth) and culminate with the Busselton Ironman, I would be embarking on my first break in nearly four years. Driven by a deep desire to 'earn' this break, I would take both mind and body to a place they had never before been on the final lap of the IM run. As a consequence, I paid a physical and physiological price for my efforts, a price none the less I was willing to pay. I wanted to be able to look myself in the mirror knowing I left nothing out on that course, that I honored the hard work and personal sacrifices that I had put in and made over the past six months. That the incredible and unwavering support of my wife, children and family, and all the sacrifices that they made, along with the support from friends and sponsors, were for something a little more tangible than merely a finish.

From a training perspective, (injury notwithstanding) the lead up to the race had gone well. A steady progression that started 10 weeks out from the GC worlds and all but peaking for the Perth LD worlds, was built on slightly, but generally maintained over the remaining five weeks until IM. From a motivational / psychological perspective however, this six month period (especially the last 4-6 weeks) was really tough. Nearly four years of consistent racing, training, injury, commitment and focus was starting to take it's toll on both myself and those immediately affected by it all...my wife Sonja and two little girls, Kirra and Jess. I was missing them, us, the whole normal family thing so much. Triathlon aside, work and life was already exceptionally tough and demanding for Sonja. We have had my best mate living with us since January and his three children two nights a week and every second weekend. It was getting harder and harder to walk out that door to go training, knowing the load I was leaving Sonja to deal with. The thought of just pulling up stumps had crossed my mind so many times, I even flew to Launceston for four nights to discuss all this with my sister and brother in law who's counsel I hold in the highest regard.

In keeping true to myself and thanks to Sonja's near incomprehensible level of support and near masochistic love of difficulty and hardship, we decided to push on and finish what we started. GC worlds were an experience we wanted to tick off and an excuse to visit some close friends in QLD, Perth was an opportunity too good to miss, but IM had become the reason our hearts beat.

For all the demands, sacrifices, conflict and grumpiness that goes with it, IM has delivered many special life savoring moments for us both. It has taken us to the

extremes of emotion and so many unforgettable places in between. Normal life for the time being at least would have to wait. There was still work to do, a commitment we both made many months before to be honored. Through the very few highs and many lows – we soldiered on. Win lose or draw, this finish was always destined to be special. We had already earned the spoils of the aftermath, but then there is earning and there is really earning... I however, wanted to *really really* earn this break and so the motto for not only my race, but for all the training and preparation was born. In the months leading up and throughout the day it would be a mantra repeated many hundreds of times. I would either go into this break knowing unequivocally that I 'earn't it', or they would pile my lifeless body into the back of an ambulance having tried.

THE RACE

Given the consistent string of results over the previous full & half IM races, there would be no departure from any of the tried and established routines. 48 hour nutrition / hydration – carbohydrate / sodium loading strategies, pre-pre race psychological preparedness, pre race nutrition and hydration plans were either implemented or in place. There was nothing left to do now but race.

RACE START MINUS 3HRS 10MIN

I woke easily from what was probably my best ever pre-race night's sleep, to ensure my three hour out last feed. With the old faithful mashed banana and honey on toast and an extra chocolaty milo in the fuel tank, I headed off enjoying my last opportunity for some quiet time as I walked the 15 min from our motel to transition. The day broke revealing the most beautiful of conditions. A magnificent sky, warm but not hot and barely a breath of wind. It would later prove to be a classic mother nature fakey though as the day unfolded. Arriving at transition I set about the final preparation and with all the preliminaries in place and triple check completed, I headed across the road to the caravan park, where like last year my mum and dad had a caravan parked front row centre. This has proved an absolute God send, both for me and for Sonja and the kids as a home base throughout the long day. A comprehensive stretch completed and ongoing trickle hydration adhered to; it was time to suit up and make our way to the swim start. Typically, the tension and anxiety was at redline levels and I was contributing to it as much as anybody. It was energizing to know that the end was near and that hopefully there were only some nine hours between now and the break our family so deeply coveted. I couldn't get started quickly enough. I was ready to go...and I was ready to suffer.

RACE START MINUS 1 MIN

Standing there in the water, the steady quickening of blood pulsing in my ears, I closed my eyes and prayed for strength in all its forms.

RACE START MINUS 10 SEC

Slowly opening my eyes, I breathed one last deep breath and mouthed in quiet determination...Earn this!

RACE START

Staying wide and out of trouble seems to be a tactic more and more employed by athletes for the mass starts of an IM swim these days, so with a denser than normal concentration of swimmers keeping left of field to contend with, we were finally off. Using 08 Busselton IM as a benchmark, where I obtained PB's across all three disciplines, my first goal would be to try and improve on the 56min 46sec swim of that race. Thanks to finally (after more than 3 ½ years of training on my own) getting myself down to swim squad, (all be it for only six sessions) my confidence and speed through improved technique, a more varied programme and some much appreciated one on one tutelage from Ross Pedlow, had improved. From the minute we got under way, until stepping up onto the sand, I was focused, in control, out of trouble and physically and aerobically in charge. I never managed to find any feet and as beneficial as it is to get onto a good set of feet, I don't dislike the idea of having my own space to concentrate 100% on what I'm doing.

The magnificent Busselton had turned it on once again and as apprehensive as I get about my swim, I wouldn't wish to be swimming anywhere else in the world. The water was stunning, a beautiful temperature and colors that would turn artists weak at the knees. And with the Jetty in the state it was, more visual stimulation than normal was on offer as we plowed the out and back 3.8km course. I'll run naked down the Hay St mall if this isn't the most magnificent IM swim leg in the world. (No you can't quote me on this!) Anyway the result – a close to three minute PB. Up on the sand in 53:33. 49th overall out of the water and fourth in my age group. As I looked at my split, I couldn't believe it. This was very unfamiliar territory for me. The race had already morphed into some hither to unforeseen incarnation, where maybe, just maybe I wouldn't have to spend the rest of the day chasing tail.

As quick as I try to make my transitions, I was prepared this year to slow down a touch, take those few extra moments and ensure that everything was hunky dory. There would be no forgetting gel bottles or misplacing (on my head) sunnies this time. With UV and temperature forecasts being what they were, I would also ensure I was not left wanting in the sunscreen department either. With all the boxes mentally ticked I exited transition in 2min 49seconds.

RACE START + 56MIN 47SEC

Despite all the psychological hurdles throughout the training phase, there was one little carrot dangling there that I was pretty keen to sink my teeth into. Thanks to my great friend come sponsor and number one fan Ian Mansfield and his company XU1 sports, I would be riding arguably one of the hottest, fastest bikes out on course that day. A fully SRAM Red equipped 'Ceepo Venom' with a Zipp 900 disc/ 808 front tubular wheel set. I had ridden this bike at the GC worlds and was really happy with it, but it wasn't until the Perth LD worlds where it really came into it's own. Having headed out on the run feeling immeasurably better than I have ever done previously (especially after what was a pretty taxing 80k's) I just couldn't wait to get it out on a course and a distance it was engineered for. Was the bike to run transition of the LD worlds an aberration? or did the set up and geometry of this bike play an integral role? My money was with the bike...It rides and feels like it was made for me.

A smooth mount and I was off. Immediately noticeable was the absence of those post swim legs that can take sometimes many kilometers on the bike to engage. It was a great feeling to feel the power down from the get go. Things were going well to plan, with a couple of bonus little extras. The plan was to be no different from last year. Keep a comfortable pace and up the effort into the wind, which by this stage was starting to exert its influence out on the course. Busselton is such a great course at the best of times, but it's even better suited to a windy day in so much as the course changes direction so often and is for the most part sheltered. You never find yourself having to drive for too long into the wind, before a reprieve presents itself just around the next corner. I finished the first lap nearly three minutes ahead of target time and feeling better by the K. The nutrition, hydration and sodium strategies supplied entirely through Carboshotz Sports Nutrition products, as always were working a treat. Coming into town grabbing my much anticipated dose of moral support and with the gauge on the confidence meter steadily rising, I blasted out for the second lap.

Lap two was pretty much a repeat of the first, except that it was on this lap where I was overtaken for the first time by about five other riders. The tempo they had displayed to get to that position though was one they weren't able to maintain for long and I subsequently had them reeled back in and dropped over the next 10 or so K's. At the little over half way point of this lap I had my one and only mishap for the day, unfortunately marring what would otherwise have been a near flawless race. My spare tyre, pit stop and tools had worked its way lose and fallen off. Amazingly I was aware that it happened, despite being able to hear very little over the rush of the wind and the aero helmet. I doubled back, picked it up and ensured via a method I should have employed in the first instance that it wouldn't happen again. Back on the Ceepo and 'well rested' after my one minute of forced R & R, I set about making up for the deficit all be it in a controlled manner, as there was still a very long way to go.

It was about this point of the ride that I remember feeling the heat of the day starting to bare down and although I was intimately aware and had planned my race around the knowledge that we would be dealing with a hot day, it was a timely reminder of this fact. As such I became that little more vigilant in factoring this in to my time V output V intake calculations and more importantly started to mentally prepare for what was to come.

Several K's before the end of the second lap I had once again accounted for the bikes that had passed me during my forced rest period and entered town still feeling strong. It has been at or around this point on nearly all my long training rides that I've started to feel myself really settling in and today was to prove no different. It was just another nice piece of mental weaponry to take into the race. Allowing for the estimated one minute time loss, I was near smack on the 1hr 35min splits I was targeting. Into town, another dose of awesome moral support and it was down to the business lap.

Whilst there is no denying some degree of mental / physical fatigue over the duration of such a ride, it was fantastic to feel as good as I was at this point. I only ever train on my road bike, such has been my faith in the set-ups of my TT bikes and with the Ceepo proving to be the joy to ride that it was, I can only have been experiencing the dividends of having such a technically beautiful and perfectly set up bike. It was here too that my most anticipated moment would unfold; seeing how my body transitioned from the bike to the run. Powering on for the last lap, I would enter T2 with a final split once again near smack on 1hr 35min. I had achieved my bike leg goal of matching or being as close as I could to last years uncharacteristically (for me) bike split of 4:45. Take away time for T1 and I rode a 4:46:03 which if I further subtracted my lost minute would have me where I wanted to be. More importantly though, as my feet hit the ground for the first time in nearly five hours...they felt great. The LD worlds were not an aberration. I felt more ready to run this marathon than any before it. My race was well and truly set up and my goal of going sub 9hrs was looking do-able. Unfortunately someone with a bent sense of humor thought it might be funny to invite the FURNACES OF HELL! to the party and this time at least, it was going to take some ferreting around in some deep dark never before visited recesses of my intestinal fortitude, to make this goal a reality. Exiting T2 in 2min 24sec, fresh prickle free socks (refer 08 race report) in place and heavily lubed up, it was time to put my mantra on loop and fight my way to the finish line.

RACE START + 5HR 45MIN 15SEC

The 400ml pump bottle of lemon V I had in my run bag must have popped open in the heat of the sun, so the initial energy boost / steadying tool I use to settle in was down to probably 50-80mls. I would have done better sucking it from my cap which was saturated in the stuff. This was by no means a drama, so finishing what little I had, I quickly settled in to enjoy this never before experienced (during IM) sensation of feeling my run legs from the outset.

One of the key promises I made to myself before this race was to smile a lot more and to try and enjoy every moment of this incredible opportunity to be racing Ironman. I have felt the fun slowly ebb from my races recently, replaced instead with a more competitive, focused and business like approach. To a large extent the smiles had disappeared and it was time to find them again. Whilst I certainly did keep this promise for the best part, it became near impossible to maintain anything that even closely resembled a smile over the back half of the race.

I completed the first lap pretty comfortably in a little over 56min adhering rigorously to cooling and fueling strategies along the way. Not knowing my position in the field, it wasn't until I would come down pass the Goose and swim exit that I was advised that there were two age groupers ahead of me. An uncrowded course at this early stage afforded me a visual on the said athletes, but with some 30 km's to go and already running strong I just maintained the tempo, not getting carried away. By the final turn with less than one Kilometer to go however, I had moved into the lead. Not only was it the first time I had knowledge of my position in the field, but that position happened to be first and it happened as I was about to pass a very vocal and supportive entourage of family, friends and supporters along the main straight. The race had already far exceeded expectations and it was only getting better. I'll never forget the energy I was given as I passed my family and friends...they were so into it.

As it turned out, this was the last time I would savour the moment in the manner I did, as the final two passes found me in a survival induced catatonic trance. The mind and body were starting to direct any and all energies into getting one foot in front of the other and as such my capacity to absorb any external stimuli was greatly reduced. The second lap was not so bad, completed in a touch over 1hr 2min, but by the time I came around to commence the final lap, my journey to 666 Pain Ave, Weirdsville, had well and truly begun.

It certainly put a different spin on things knowing I was fighting to hold onto my first place. To defend my overall age group win from last year was something that had never crossed my mind, yet was now tantalizingly close and maybe, just maybe if Courtney bonks, I could get my name on the Mark Batten trophy for a second time...now that would be cool! And so these motivational elements were added to the arsenal of options I was drawing on to keep me going forward. Many times I felt the ebb & flow of near zero energy, alternate with a spark of something that made me lift for a couple of hundred meters. Up and down, aid station to aid station, kilometer by painful kilometer. All the while my body's reserves hovering dangerously close to empty. My hamstrings had been threatening to go for the past several kilometers so much so that I had consciously reduced my stride length in an effort to stave off their going and get me home. But it wasn't enough; four kilometers to go and the left one went leaving me no option but to stop and stretch. As quick as I could I was on my way. Not enough though - another stretch, imagining / picturing all the while my

first place slipping away. This time it was enough and I forged on, back past the bluer which was the main straight when approaching the final turn the hamstring went again. The same thoughts and pictures, only this time more devastating, filled my mind. To fight and hold my place for the best part of 30 kilometers only to forfeit it 800 meters from the finish line... well that's just plain not fair!

How I got going as quickly as I did I'll never know. There were many strange forces at work over the final lap of the run, but regardless of which one or ones I could pinpoint as being responsible for getting me to the finish line, is irrelevant... I got there!

RACE FINISH

RACE START + 8HRS 52MIN 25SEC

It's always been my way in whatever form of racing I participate in, to not worry about those around me. No studying opponents races, no looking over shoulders. I worry about me and what I'm doing and don't fall into the trap of having someone else dictate my race. Today more than ever before though, I really wanted to enjoy every moment and because finish time had essentially become irrelevant, as I entered the chute I afforded myself a precautionary glance over the shoulder. The relief I felt when there was no-one in sight, I could never describe. Whilst the battle was waged for 30 kilometers, today at least I would not have to fight for this win to the bitter end. And so my near delirious journey up the chute to the finish line began. I mouthed quietly to myself one last time... 'you earn't this!'

With a marathon time of 3:07:10 amidst a kaleidoscope of emotion, color, cheering and noise, I crossed the line. I had fought the battle of my short racing life and hung on. In conditions that proved the undoing of so many accomplished athletes on the day...I persevered. I had put it all on the line like never before and come out on top. I got there...we got there - Team Hosko... together. By the end a physical price had been paid and on the journey all forms of dues. The reward... three days on and off crutches, blisters, swelling and deep soft tissue damage to both lower legs and feet. Physically broken – yes, but emotionally and psychologically supercharged. The IM glow fueled by the deeply satisfying and proud sense of achievement and accomplishment has like some paranormal entity, taken its rightful place.

There were some times over the last lap of the run where I was beginning to think that maybe the ambulance option could actually become a possibility, but instead as I write this beside a beautiful pool in Sanur Bali, energy returning to my battle weary body, blisters all but gone, the limping minimal, I smile with deep satisfaction, knowing unequivocally that I (we) 'earnt' this... no guilt attached.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sonja and the kids aside, this journey could never have been possible without the incredible support I received from both my and Sonja's parents in the form of baby sitting to free me up for so many training sessions. Thank you so much. You all know how deeply grateful I/ we are.

To my sponsors, in no particular order:

Skins Compression sportswear.

Frans and the amazing crew at Bikeforce Woodvale.

Ian Mansfield and XU1 Sports.

Daz & Steph Griffiths @ Carboshotz

Symmetry Cycle Coaching.

Steve @ Padbury Pharmacy

Blue Seventy Wetsuits.

Thanks guys, you all rock!