



Race Report



**World Long Distance Championships
Sean O'Neill – 18th Men's Elite Field**

Race morning I was up at 5am for an early breakfast before riding into town on the TT bike to get in a good warm up. My warm up took me along Mounts Bay Rd where we would ride for the actual race and it was here I found out how windy it really was. I struggled to hit 25km/hr riding into the easterly breeze and the river looked angry to say the least. In a way I was kind of glad at how the weather turned out as the course was dead flat and needed something challenging to break up the field a bit.

After putting on my race numbers back to front and having Kathryn Bailie rectify, I racked my bike and wandered down to the water for a quick warm-up. I felt very out of place in the elite tent and was wondering at that point if I should have been racing age-group after all. At least then I would have a chance at a medal. One thing that made me feel better was the fact that I didn't have the same pressure these guys have at every race. For me it is still a hobby and one I am passionate about but I have work to fall back on while these guys do it for a living and a poor performance means they go hungry for a few weeks (no wonder they are all so skinny). Before I could think too much about it the race was about to start and I just had to get on with the job.

I started out wide in the swim and avoided the chaos for the first 200m until the pace settled down and I established myself in a small pack. I new a lead group would get away but I figured if I could hang onto the second pack it would put me in a good position and I would have company to ride with. Due to the rough conditions the field ended up spreading out much more than I thought and I exited the water 5mins down on the leaders and approx 2mins down on the main field. I wasn't too disappointed as I came out with 5 others and I felt as though I was still in touch despite the large gap.

Onto the bike and I was first of our group to hit the road but before I knew it a flying Frenchman (Francois Cheboud) flew past me at the Swan Brewery and I was faced with the decision of chasing or settling into a more comfortable pace. I didn't want to end up like I did in Busso earlier in the year nearly walking the run, so I decided to hold my pace. If any of the others had decided to chase Francois I would have had to respond but thankfully they sat back also and I was left to set the pace for the first lap. My speedo failed on the day so I went entirely off feel and I just remember Craig Alexander saying the key to a good ride is maintaining an even power output throughout rather than surging. Thankfully the other 4 guys left in our group were a very even and we managed a consistent pace throughout the day. The only hiccup being the last lap when a few of the age group guys tried to jump into the pace line before spotting a draft-buster and trying to sprint to the front to avoid a penalty. They would subsequently die 2mins later and our pace would go up and down like a yoyo.

Despite the wind and relatively tough conditions I was happy to get off the bike and still feel ok for the run. I tried not to look too much at the gap the leaders were putting into us as they were absolutely flying and there was no way I could make up that ground. In the end the front group all rode between 1:52 - 1:54 for 80kms which left me a further 7mins off the pace. Thankfully the crowd were still giving us a huge cheer every lap although I felt I wasn't giving them much to cheer about. I have to say that the crowd was incredible on race day and I have never felt so supported. Simon Beaumont came up with some classic quotes which kept me amused throughout the day and the family had organised a heap of bright yellow supporters shirts for both Lisa and I which made them very easy to identify. I felt as though everywhere I went on the course there was someone cheering and I can't tell you how much of a difference it made, so thanks to everyone who came to support and a huge thankyou to all the volunteers who did a great job.

It was now onto the run and suddenly it was getting hot out there. Jason Crowther was the first of our group out of T2 and I quickly followed. The initial pace felt uncomfortable but I knew I could hold it if I stayed hydrated and fuelled. It wasn't long before Jason started to drop off but as soon as he did 2 others from our group went flying past and I couldn't respond. I couldn't believe how fast these guys could move being a long course race as I would be happy to run that quick over Olympic Distance. Hopefully the heat would take its toll and I could reel them back in later on but

after 10kms they had a 2min gap and it was growing. I think I took in water at nearly every aid station and had 2 gels throughout the run but I felt better than I ever have in a long course event. The running I have been doing over the past 4 months with Jon Kappler was paying off and I now felt confident I could last 20kms without fading.

The last 2 laps on the run were pretty tough but thankfully a few of the age group guys ran with me in sections and the crowd kept the spirits high throughout. On the last lap I passed Axel Zeebroek of Belgium who had ridden 1:55 but was now reduced to a very slow jog. I knew his pain as I was there only 6 months ago but it was good to finally pass someone out there. The finishing chute was fantastic as the crowd went crazy despite me being placed 18th. My run time was 1:17:41, approximately 7mins faster than Busselton and the course was actually measured at 21.3kms. This was my biggest positive from the race and one that should give me confidence going into the rest of the season. Despite a top 10 expectation going into the race I am still quite happy with the performance. I need to do a fair bit more work on the bike to be competitive but my run is coming along and the swim as usual could do with a couple more minutes.

A huge thankyou must go out to Rod Fitzgerald from SRG, Bruce Dewar from Dexion Balcatta, Russell Brooks from the Old Canton and all the guys from Glenn Parker Cycles. These guys are passionately involved in sport themselves and have shown amazing support leading up to the Worlds. Congratulations to everyone who finished the race in such tough conditions and a special congrats to the WA medal winners.

After tackling Augusta Anaconda next weekend I'm looking forward to doing some short course racing over the summer as I think WA is getting a lot of depth in the elite field and guys like Paul Mackay, Brynt McSwain, Kenji Nener and Lajos Varga, to name just a few, will make for some exciting racing. I will be doing some speed work between now and then to get up to scratch and will focus on the Busso Half at the end of the season with a chance to race the pro's on home soil once again.

Regards,
SeanO