

How I Did The Double Iron

Posted: March 13, 2012 by Karen Alexeev

There I was searching USAT rankings when I caught a glimpse of the words FLORIDA DOUBLE IRON. With my heart pounding I quickly scrolled back and found next to it a finish time of 32:48:13 and the name Cathy Tibbetts, age 56. Without hesitation I Googled the website and checked out all the details – date, place, race info, participant resumes and called the race director, Steve Kirby, immediately!

In fact, after reading the resumes, I found there is a Triple, Quad, Quintuple, Deca and Double Deca! Makes the Double look easy. Then, I was in awe of Guy Rossi, who has an incredible history. I had no idea this event that I have wanted to do since 1996 was right here in my backyard. How convenient is that? I say convenient because it is only 45 minutes away and in a contained area. In 1996, it was held out of state, you needed a crew on a boat while you swam, a crew to ride behind you on the bike and run. It was difficult to manage all of that and then the race was cancelled.

Luckily, I had the finances, sent in the application and there I was: committed. Here it is October 17, 2011 with only 102 days left to train and I am just getting started. Then I thought, "am I crazy?" I believe that muscles have memory and knew I had my work cut out for me. I just could not pass it up. It's been 3 years since I did my last Iron 2008 or run a marathon for that matter. I got my little Chihuahua, Odis nearly 3 years ago and reduced my workouts, gained weight....forget that negative. A motivational speaker from years past, Tony Robbins, gave me a motto to remember: Belief, Desire and Expectancy. Metaphysically, it is all about how thoughts are things.

Karen's Double Iron Blog

Posted: March 14, 2012 by Karen Alexeev

Now that I have increased my level of training for the Double Iron it's one that has to be maintained as my body craves MORE. I had carefully reduced my workouts the past few years to accommodate my schedule & keep a balance of fitness (eating a lot & keeping my weight down) at that lower level. It will either take time to adjust to less food & training or find a way to maintain the time it takes to keep this up. Not sure how many full time jobs I want to handle right now. After all my goal was the Double & I did that. This sport is so addicting... subconsciously considering another Double or even a Triple? Sad to say other important issues are in my immediate future.

How I Did The Double Iron – 2

Posted: March 15, 2012 by Karen Alexeev

For those who may not know the Double Iron consists of a 4.8 mile swim, 224 mile bike and a 52.4 mile run. The Florida Double Iron swim was held at North Tampa YMCA, 76 laps in a 50 meter pool, bike was 31 laps on a 6.86 mile loop at Flatwoods Park and the run was 30 laps on a 1.74 mile loop, also at Flatwoods - very safe, contained and convenient course for both the athlete and spectator. I felt the laps passed quickly and long before you could tire so therefore it was easier than you think.

My conversation with race director Steve Kirby was encouraging and he enlightened me to the fact that when I finish the Double, I will become the oldest woman in the world to complete it. He suggested I contact Guinness Book of World Records in advance. YIKES! All of a sudden I felt this pressure. I still had to figure out how I was going to accomplish this feat and I had to do it in a relaxed state of mind. I did contact Guinness, submitted my application and learned that should Guinness arrive it would include press and presentation of an official document on the spot; all of that for a fee of approximately \$6,000. I was both disappointed and relieved when Guinness denied my application. The reason stated was "that a record of this kind which is qualified by age cannot be accommodated in a reference work as general as Guinness World Records...we must concentrate on absolute records, rather than those that are qualified in some way." Well, humnnn....now that is out of the way. When I finish I will still be the oldest woman to complete the Double IRON, fewer people will know.

For the longest time I kept thinking I needed a change in my life and thought it would be moving somewhere else. The universe responded with the Double IRON. I did a few triathlons in the late 70's and set my goal on Kona. I came back, built my training from sprints to the half, did one 3 mile swim and one 112 mile bike to mentally know I could do it. I had no doubt that I would do well. My first Ironman distance was the Great Floridian in 1996, I was 44. I decided it would be a long training day so I spent 11 minutes in transition – eating a bagel, relaxing and talking. I came in 2nd in my age group and knew this was for me. Spending the entire day outside and exercising is what I love. I continued to do an Ironman every year and finally went to Kona in 2003.

I was given a free entry for the Great Floridian Ironman distance one year with just 22 days prior to race day. WOW, a free entry there was no way I would pass that up. I knew I could do it, my time would be slower and perhaps longer recovery. That same thinking applied to doing the Double, only no free entry. Right from the start to my surprise if I mentioned the DOUBLE IRON it seems all I got was negative feedback, change of conversation, just general disinterest from other triathletes! Of course I had a few friends who were thrilled. Early on while riding on the Pinellas trail, an old friend

Jerry Krueger told me if anyone can do it, I can. I found that a local Tampa girl, Tammie Wanning, was a participant. I read her FaceBook postings for the duration and although we never trained together she was my virtual partner as 90% of my training was done alone. Tammie was way ahead of me but kept me focused by sharing her workouts - that competitive spirit. Thank you Tammie!

I made a calendar with a reasonable schedule for each month as I had 102 days to train. At first, it was slow going and gradually consumed me 24/7. I estimated what I could do and set goals knowing that if I did too much I could risk injury and setbacks. I was careful. It was easy to increase my runs from 15 – 30 + miles a week. I biked about 100 miles a week and increased to 150 with my longest one time 120 miles. I spent a considerable amount of money on bike repairs, new wheels, tires, seat, shoes; but it all paid off as I had absolutely no problem with the bike portion. I tried swimming in the Gulf as long as I could as chlorine in pools is a problem. The first 3 mile swim sent me starved to Athenian Gardens for some spinach pie. I knew I needed to be stronger and had to be consistent with weights at least 3 times a week. Once my schedule was doable, I kept it. I knew from the start I would be undertrained and recovery may be longer, but, it would be a long training day. My only goal was to finish. At first I thought I would finish in 32 hours and actually, had I not goofed off so much, I would have.

I found that nutrition was an issue as it seemed I could not satisfy my hunger. I love Snickers Marathon Caramel Nut Crunch bars and they worked for awhile. I drank lots of PowerAde and ate raspberry gel bursts. I began eating steak and Kettle brand Krinkle Salt & Pepper potato chips – very tasty with Tzatziki yogurt as I was craving them! My favorite food was Salmon Salad at Bonefish grill, spinach pie, tons of vegetables and Nutella on apples, bananas and strawberries. I liked that Ensure chocolate or vanilla muscle revigor after workouts. So, favs would be the foods I ate at the Double IRON.

Most events are organized so that all you do is show up and race. This event required that you provide a crew, supplies, tent and someone to drive your car from the pool to the park and unload it. I am so grateful to Chris and Georgia for running with me, my son Sam for staying late while I biked but especially Miranda Lessie who made all of it possible for me. Miranda made me feel extra special: she paid for my room, put 2 salmon salads in the frig, helped set up the tent, drove my car from pool to park, unloaded, stayed all day and returned the following day to run with me, took pictures, drove me home and came to the awards party. Miranda, and her husband Jeff, put on their own race that Saturday morning so the sacrifice she made for me was above and beyond my expectations. You are one good friend Miranda!

How I Did The Double Iron – 3

Posted: March 16, 2012 by Karen Alexeev

On January 31st I tripped over a small gate, came crashing down on my left knee and jammed my right big toe into a concrete sand dollar stepping stone. The medial side of my left knee swelled up and bruised badly. My right shin had cuts, my toe turned black and to this day is still a bit swollen and not healed completely. I immediately iced both injuries and told myself I heal fast. I rode that day, often hitting my knee on the bike frame, and ran 13 the next day. So I was relieved the injuries would not be in the way of my training. Every year I do a series of local running races: mostly 5K's and 1/2 marathons which I continued to do prior to the Double. I realized my training was about long steady runs and not necessarily speed, but, I wouldn't sacrifice my favorite races. When I wasn't racing, I went to the gym for my high impact aerobic/dance class. My instructor has the greatest routine. Sad to say I was skimping on my yoga workouts. I do go to the chiropractor prior to races since I have rotated scoliosis as it definitely helps my performance. I will not go into details but I am much more high maintenance than that.

Once I decided to do the Double I set out to find anyone willing to crew for me. I was so focused on preparation for the tent, supplies and who would care for my little Chihuahua Odis, that I hardly noticed the Maddog's Triathlon Club did not respond. I knew I had dependable friends and it would work out. I did not have to worry about my animals since my good friend Debbie would come to my home and I knew Odis loved her. So, rather than drive over in the morning and risk my VW acting up, I got a room. I arrived to find that Miranda had already paid for it and put 2 salmon salads in the frig. What a wonderful surprise! We drove over to Flatwoods State Park to set up the tent and check in when I saw a MadDog tent.

How I Did The Double Iron – 4

Posted: March 17, 2012 by Karen Alexeev



Suffice to say, I was shocked to see a MadDog canopy, knowing I was the only member participating and no one contacted me about being part of my crew. Turns out they were crew for the Swedes. My canopy had sides for privacy so I could change clothes and rest. We put the table, chairs, coolers, cushion and cot inside for the night.

Miranda left and I returned to my room, ate one salmon salad then drove to the pre-race dinner. I made 2 pound cakes, one for the dinner and the other for my crew. Some athletes were concerned about the course from the pool to the park being too dangerous with the construction so it was decided they could drive over, get a 30 minute penalty and not be included in IUTA rankings. I decided to do the entire course the way it was laid out. Aside from that it was a good opportunity to meet the athletes and be introduced.

This is it, the day has finally arrived. I woke up alert, heated up the spinach pie, coffee with Ovaltine & chocolate creamer, loaded the car and waited for Miranda. I was feeling nervous but I arrived at the pool at 6 a.m. with plenty of time to relax. The water felt warm so I decided not to wear a wetsuit. Only a few of us went without wetsuits. Well, the water was much colder than I thought, it was overcast the duration of the swim and I never warmed up. The lanes were divided by finish time. There were five swimmers in my lane. We



had 76 laps to complete with counters at one end and crew at the other. I could not keep track of my laps and kept thinking the counters missed one. dah. After 3 miles my calves cramped, creating some drag so I stopped a few times to stretch. I felt a strain in my arms and slowed a bit. I reminded myself this was a long training day. I had plenty of time, have fun and all I have to do is finish. Miranda was cheering me on,



counting laps, taking photos and handing me food. Suddenly a turtle appeared in my lane! Wow, broke my concentration and lightened things up. The lanes were emptying and finally I finished in 3:20, glad not to be the last. I was very happy to exit the pool and headed for the shower. Took my time chatting with Miranda, changed, had a snack and mounted my bike. Now the sun comes out and the wind picks up. I was off.

How I Did The Double Iron -5

Posted: March 27, 2012 by Karen Alexeev



Part of how I did the Double Irons involves what I describe as high maintenance. There are a myriad of rituals that work for me; aside from a visit to the chiropractor. To be able to compete with rotated scoliosis and a neck that no longer has a natural curve – due to several whiplashes: I keep my weight down; use an orthopod (gravity traction device designed to decompress your spine); and a roller (made of wood looks like a rolling pin with 2 raised areas in the center 2" apart designed to

release trigger points along erector spinae) on a daily basis. I also use a thermophore (automatic moist heat pack) to calm any spasms. I use the menthol Wellpatch on my back for spasms and White Flower liniment on my knees if any aches. I have a Jeanie (electric) massager that is heavy duty and works quickly. Wow, that does sound like a lot! Every day I do Yoga, which is about balance, strength, breathing, stretching and key to avoiding injuries. Deciding to do the DOUBLE IRON was the best choice I've made in years. Preparation is everything.

I packed some fireballs, gel bursts, snickers marathon caramel nut crunch bar, peppermint gum, glucose tablets, ibuprofen, a bandanna and my cell phone in my mesh bike pouch, located between my arrow bars. Like a little first-aid kit. I had PowerAde in my water bottles and plenty of sunscreen. The route from the pool to the rear entrance of Flatwoods Park involved traffic, but, I easily spotted the volunteers directing the way and took my time. Waiting at the light on Bruce B Downs, Miranda honked as she drove by in my car on her way to the park to unload my stuff into the tent. She looked really cute driving it. Well, I enjoyed that little adventure but was glad to be safe in the park with no traffic. The sun was warm and comfortable although the wind was not so kind. I think there was about 2 miles of relief just before the aid area. The course was a 6.8 mile loop and we had 31 laps to do once we passed by the first time. I loved the sound of the timer on each lap, a loud be-zung! We had a device attached to our bikes, mine was under my seat, to record our laps. I stopped often during the day to replenish my drinks and it felt good to pause for a moment.

I took actual breaks to visit with friends, eat my salmon salad, Ensure, chips, apple and other stuff and use the rest room. Oddly enough, that only happened a few times. At

times I rode with Kacie, Tammie, Ben and Lars before they dusted me. I only saw a few other athletes on my laps. The wind was relentless. Here we were in a Park and I only saw a few turtles and snakes all day. Miranda was terrific as my crew and stayed till early evening, but would return the next day around noon to run with me. She and her husband Jeff were putting on their own race in the morning. Linda Rozell surprised me and stayed a few hours while I biked. Chris and Georgia arrived around 7 p.m. and helped out a lot. My son Sam came with his dog Jack arrived soon after. Of course I stopped to visit and at times felt a little antsy because I didn't need to stop and wanted to take advantage of my energy and daylight while I had it.

I reminded myself it was about finishing injury/pain free and enjoying the experience. I am not sure how many laps I rode before I took a break in the evening. Once it was dark I wore my yellow tinted glasses. The race provided fruit snacks of apricots, prunes, chocolate covered raisins that kept me busy in the dark. I had two bike lights and one on my helmet. After a few hours of straining to see as there was no full moon I put new batteries in. Wow, now I can see, what a relief! For the most part I was averaging 25 minutes a lap and tried to do the math on projected finish time. I had planned on fifteen hours including breaks. I changed into a long sleeve, my Northeast Cycles jersey & shorts because of the damp chill in the air. So glad to have those sides on my canopy. At the pre-race dinner, Steve spoke about riding at 2 a.m. and I thought no way, I'll be off my bike before midnight. I rode with Tammie late in the evening and told her looks like I'm gonna be one of those people who ride after 2 a.m. I stopped to put some White Flower on my knees and didn't see her again until the run.

On one of my stops visiting with Chris and Georgia, who were great, I drank some Heed, a high performance electrolyte. That was good. Other crews were out there partying and seemed like everyone was having a good time. Chris and Georgia left around 11p.m. but would return around 9a.m. to run with me. I am so grateful for the sacrifices they made for me. My son Sam had an intestinal bug but stayed until 1a.m. or so. He too would return later that morning. It was then I had some chicken soup with Steve and Cindy. It was way past my bedtime and I had enough of the wind, dark and whatever was rustling in the brush keeping up with me while I rode alone out there. Yikes that really made me uncomfortable. Steve reminded me I had until 9a.m. to finish the bike portion and that was motivation enough to finish right then. I certainly did not want to compromise the run with limited time. I wasn't yawning nor did I feel tired. I think fear kept me determined to get 'r done.

A few rabbits darted out across my path along with a rat. As the hours passed, I began to think I was the only one out there. No tail lights ahead and no lights behind me. I stopped to ask John at the timing station how many laps I had left since it appears I lost track like I was delirious or something. He also assured me I was not the lone ranger out there. There were 2 sections on the course that were so dark it was as if I closed my eyes. At one point I shown my light on my computer and I was doing 14 mph. Oh No! I soooo looked forward to hearing that bells and whistles sound of the last

lap. It was amazing the energy surge knowing this is it - I am finally going to finish. To my surprise it was approximately 3:30 a.m. I was so happy to get off that bike. I went into my tent, changed into my running clothes, rested on my comfy cot, ate some chips and contemplated the day. Not tired, feel good and around 4:15 a.m. or so I decided to run.

How I Did The Double Iron – 6

Posted: April 2, 2012 by Karen Alexeev



Before I left my tent, I attached my chip to my left ankle, grabbed a stick of gum and stretched. As I headed over to begin the 52.4 mile run I attached my headlight and hit the timer. Now the fun begins.

As I began to run, I was surprised and delighted how easy it was. I had a good pace going from the start. It was very dark and all I could see were headlights bobbing up and down coming towards me. As the lights approached and I could barely make

out who it was, I would say "hello", or "good morning" with no response...humnn I wondered did anyone hear me?

The run course was a short loop of 1.74 miles, so the checkpoint turn and timing area came quickly. At least it seemed that way. I began to like the repetition and the miles went by fast. As I had done throughout the day, I was trying to do the math on approximate lap and finish time. The great thing about the run portion was being able to have a friend pace you. I knew Chris, Georgia and Miranda would return to run at least the 2nd marathon with me. I was kinda jealous that Kacie and Tammie had "their girls" with them every time I passed by.

It was chilly and it wasn't long before my clothes were wet and I began to chafe. Luckily the timers had body glide (=) available. Ran another lap and then changed my clothes. So glad to have sides on the canopy. I started drinking my flat coke near the end of the 1st marathon. Now, that stuff works on me like jet fuel. I figured out nearing the finish of the 1st half, if I continued on that pace I would finish in 32 hours or less.

Yes, feeling good encourages that competitive spirit! Just past the timing area an Armadillo stopped right in front of me! I said "hello", not sure if it heard me, I reached down and touched it. Wow, they can move fast! Each time I checked in I stopped to chat, get a drink or just walk a little. Since my chip was on my left leg I ran opposite the timing area, it worked. At about 24 miles I used the restroom and then Chris and Georgia arrived. I was so happy to have company. I am sure that Georgia ran much more than she planned.

We ran, walked, talked and I discovered that my upper body was achy. Chris gave me some salt tablets, something I had never taken before. They worked like a charm. Sam came back with his dog Jack and I took another break. We all went over to get some breakfast, well, except me. I would wait on the sausages. Chris and I continued on and after a few more laps, Miranda joined us around noon or so. Chris was tapping his watch to remind me to stop goofing off and keep the pace. Chris would run ahead and get more flat coke as I approached the timing area, which saved me time because the supplies were away from the run course. I wanted to get some lipstick and Chris went nuts. What? as he was tapping his watch. I reminded him it was my race and I would stop, eat, visit, if I wanted to. And yes, I did get my lipstick.

Now I was remembering I had 36 hours to finish. It was actually harder to walk than run. Once I stopped it was difficult to get going again so I just continued on slowly. Other athletes were: either running, walking fast, walking and some were lying on the ground! I would exchange a little conversation with Kacie every time I saw her. I remember Kacie, Tammie and me smiling all day. Most were pretty focused on running. Tammie said she did not want to know what lap she was on. I learned Rebecca was only one lap behind Tammie and I was 3 laps behind her.

Chris also ran much more than he planned, like 20 miles I think. The Swedes were walking a lot of laps as was Ben who had a blister. First I thought he was just fatigued so I suggested flat coke and Chris gave him salt tablets. Miranda was there to pace me after Chris stopped.



I saw Chet out there and found he was only one lap behind me. I began to walk more often and stop to chat with Sam. Somewhere around 40 miles I felt a bit of an ache in my calves and decided to wear my Zensah calf sleeves. I also put these Mueller knee supports on as well. Why wait until they hurt? Poor Sam had an intestinal bug and tried to manage but had to leave, unable to see me finish. I was disappointed.



I thought I only had 3 more laps and found that I had 5! OMG! stopping eats up a lot of time. Suddenly Chet was right behind me! I asked, "what lap are you on?" Mine... wow, I began to run faster each lap.

Miranda asked if I was running too fast, so I said I would do the last 3 alone. I was mad I goofed off so much and again the energy surge knowing you are about to finish. I was on my last lap gaining in

momentum and passed the Swedes about 100 yards or so from the finish.

The race director came running towards me with the US Flag and handed it to me for the finish. This is it! Miranda was there taking photos, her husband Jeff and John holding the race banner that I would run underneath with the flag. Now that was exhilarating! I felt great and I finished! 34:02:17. Not bad for the "Oldest Woman In The World To Finish The Double Iron".



How I Did The Double Iron – Finish

Posted: April 9, 2012 by Karen Alexeev



Yes, I finished! =) As I stood there savoring the moment still really amped up...well, flat coke for at least 8 hours will do that. Miranda jumped in for a finish photo when I realized the Swedes: Gisela & Stefan were finishing right behind me! I kept moving because I knew that once your body has been in motion for so long, stopping could be an issue. Miranda, her husband Jeff and friends had already packed

up the tent, all of my stuff and were loading in my car. I really wanted to drive home but Miranda insisted that Jeff drive my car and she drive me. I finally conceded. We exchanged good-byes to Steve and the staff while Chet and Ben were finishing. It was official, it was over and it was time to leave.

Ah, it felt good to sit and relax. The 50 minute drive home was far from quiet. Poor Miranda, I don't think I stopped talking all the way home! Glad to see Jeff driving my 1979 VW at least 70 mph since I was worried about the balance of the wheels. That was a load off my mind. Home at last - OMG I can barely get out of the car! YIKES! My entire body seemed to lock up! It took me awhile to walk to the rear door while my Chihuahua, Odis, was inside screaming with excitement. Miranda and Jeff unloaded the car and was I happy they were there to assist me. It would have taken me painful trips to do that. My friend Debbie, who took care of Odis, arrived as Miranda filled the bathtub with ice to aid my painful legs. I gave Debbie the Spenco sandals from the race. So, after the shock of the ice bath, I had a soothing hot bath, lots of liniment, ibuprofen, and finally in that supine position after nearly two days on my feet. It was as though my body was still biking and running; with thoughts of the bike when I couldn't see in darkness, visions of the run as I sped up for the finish. I wondered if I would ever fall asleep and wake for the award ceremony in the morning.

Up early, legs restored, feeling good, I picked up debris in my yard, swept, walked Odis, fed the cats and decided what to wear. I was a bit spaced out so that was a long decision. Home and back to the usual. Excited to finally leave for the post race award ceremony and meet the other athletes. Miranda is also on her way! Overcast and cool it was like a hazy dream. The view from Whiskey Joe's, which is right on the bay, added to the high I was enjoying. The athletes spilled over into a second room with a spread of delicious food. I arrived after everyone was seated but our table was near other athletes. Miranda and I soon made our way over to the awards table.





My camera battery died and once again Miranda came to the rescue. I wish I had more time to chat with all of the athletes, who are just awesome individuals. The atmosphere was one of peaceful, warm camaraderie. Everyone content where they were. Photos were taken of the group and the three Virgos who were smiling all day, that being Kacie, me and Tammie!



Soon Steve would begin the ceremony and each athlete had the opportunity to say a few words as they were congratulated. Not all of the athletes were present as some had early flights home. All the athletes who finished the Double received a glass engraved plaque on a stand, an IUTA medallion, a long sleeve tech shirt, a finisher certificate and choice of a water bottle or other goodies. Some of us also received the paper sign with our countries flag on it meant for our shelter area at the race 'cause Steve thought we would like it for our records. Some

athletes finished at least an IRON distance and were given a certificate for that. As I watched and listened to what others had to say, I felt even more humbled. I thought it was an honor, and a privilege, that I will be forever grateful to have had the opportunity to compete. Steve announced that I became the "Oldest Woman In The World To Complete A Double Iron." Now that is something. My only regret is not getting to know the other athletes better. So there I was, in what seemed surreal, and realized everyone else was sharing that same experience. Soon it was time to say goodbye again, depart and resume my life in Gulfport. I did not want to let go, let it all end and hoped I would stay high awhile – which I did!



Thank you!