

Paul Thompson Florida Double IRON Race Report

01 March 2013, Flatwoods Park, Tampa

Training and preparation for this race had been a bit disjointed, due in most part to poor weather conditions and stop/go periods brought about by seasonal illness's, Something I had managed to avoid in the past few years. Despite a reduced overall training volume, I had managed to ramp it up in the last month, so that I had a belief that I could see this race through and compete. This belief wasn't shared by my family, but we were going to Florida anyway so I best give it a good go.

I would like to thank my sponsor's, Jim and Nathan at www.endura.co.uk/ who had kindly supplied me with bespoke race kit for the forthcoming season, and I was looking forward to wearing it on its 1st ultra outing. www.Thule.com had helped me make the 23kg weight at check-in, with their 836 bike box. Graham at www.velosportonline.co.uk had taken care of my mechanical requirements. And Steven at www.everydaytraining.co.uk had steered me into my current niche of fitness.

For this race I was lucky enough to have the company and support of Steph. We set off on our travels on the Tuesday, from our local airport Humberside. Here we would head backwards to Amsterdam, then on to Atlanta, before making the 1hr 20min connection into Tampa. It's a long winded journey (17hrs) but is quite relaxed and unhurried and doesn't require the usual long car journey and car park stay.

In Tampa we picked up the car rental and headed 23 miles to the race hotel. The race director had negotiated a discounted rate and provisionally booked a room for us. The hotel was close to the park (approx 3miles) and the room was well equipped with a small kitchen that had a stove fridge etc, which made race food preparation easy. A couple of visits over the next day or two to the local Publix supermarket and we were stocked -up.



Wednesday was spent putting the bike together and riding the loop. It was a close-on 7mile continuous stretch of slick tarmac winding its way through wood and marshland. The prevailing breeze was difficult to determine today, but feel it was in my favor on the return half, on race day it was much more noticeable, particularly later in the ride from 6pm onwards.

Thursday I went and swam in the pool and then changed and got on the bike and familiarized myself with the transition to the bike course. It involved a ride along a cycle path which crossed a main road and under the Interstate 275 and back over the main road, around 5k. This maneuver was due to ongoing road construction work, which is expected to be completed later this year, after which, a continuous path will exist all the way to the park gates. During the race the crossing detours were well marshaled and traffic was quite light so wasn't

a real problem. During the afternoon we went back to the park to meet up for registration and hook up with friends I had made at the Virginia race. Here we got our timing chips, one for the bike(fixed under the seat) and the other for the run, which was the usual ankle strap type. Finally, as is usual on the IUTA circuit, I gave a sample of blood, for hemoglobin testing.

That evening Steph, Peter Cusick and myself travelled a couple of miles to a club house in a gated complex for the pasta party and race briefing. After a strict hour of instructions and introductions, as well as a great spread laid on by Cindy Kirby and her team, we were on our way back to the hotel arriving back at 7.30pm.

RACE MORNING

I woke up at 4 am and began the routine of breakfast. Then we packed everything into the car and set off for the pool, arriving around 5.30am. I set up transition against the pool fence, took up an early position in the rest room, before putting my wetsuit on and positioning my bottles and gels at the far end of the pool. I felt really relaxed, knowing that the swim would be an unhurried affair. There was plenty of room to pass and turn in the lane, so quite stress less. I was in Lane 1 along with David Jepson, Kamil Suran, Ghislain Maréchal and Thomas Odom. Peter Cusick, was in the lane next to us.

THE SWIM



Just time for a group photo before the 7.00am start. I had a quick wash-out of the goggles during the count-down and we were set off. I pushed on and made the turn first, opting to tumble turn for the first time ever in an ultra, it worked well and seemed to keep the flow going. I went through 3.5k in approximately 50.30, at which point I stopped for a drink of Hammer Perpetuem and a gel. I then did a similar fuel stop after 1hr 30mins into the swim. Somehow my calculations had got a little skewed and led me to believe that 144lengths was the required distance, so out I climbed. The lady lap counter asked if I was "faking out" and

told me I had 400m to go. I blushingly re-entered the water and ploughed through the remaining 8lengths. Exiting for the second time, I was greeted with a good deal of applause and laughter, I thanked my lap counter lady and headed for the bike. Swim- 1hr 53mins, so happy with that. 200 m later, I was joined by Thomas in transition. Approximately 3 minutes later I was changed and on my way.

THE BIKE

My journey to the park was smooth, overnight broadcasts on the TV, regarding road closures in the area, due to new signs being installed had evidently reduced the volume of traffic on Bruce B Downs Blvd. I felt pretty good, the bike was riding quietly and the

weather was perfect for me, between 65-73 degrees F. On the early out and back mileage adjustment loop I saw that Kamil was on the course. I gauged around 10-15 minutes behind.

I got on with the job, going through 32k in the first hour, 66k at the 2hour mark, 90k in 2hrs 40 minutes and then 100k in 3hours. I reached 165k in 5 hours and reached the halfway mark of 180k in 5hrs 26 minutes. I felt and told Steph that this kind of pace was as fast as I had ever been. She was concerned that I was being steadily reeled in. A continuous loop is a difficult course to hold pole position. At 200k and around 6hrs 15mins David pulled alongside me, he seemed relieved that the chase was over. I figured that he had probably



ridden a 5.10 for the 180k. As he went past, I decided to see how the early effort would affect him now that he was leading. I stayed around 10 bike lengths away from him and observed his race. It seemed a lot easier to ride this way and provided the confidence boost I needed at this point in the race. We went around 50k like this, and I thought that I could happily go the full distance like this. However, David put the hammer down and I just couldn't respond. Despite fueling well to cope with eventualities, no amount of carbohydrate was gonna help me to cover that one 😊. A short while after, the bike race "leaked " out of me, and number 1

priority was to get the laps done! -Simple! During the last 2 laps Ghislain and Kamil came past, they were riding without any drop-off, whereas my pace had dropped significantly. the next thing I knew I was crawling off my bike and putting on my run kit. This was the 1st time I saw Peter as he sped round by the tents to do another lap, he looked to be going well.

THE RUN

The temperature had dropped so I put on multiple layers, three-quarter bottoms, and hat and gloves. I think Steph gave me some warm food and then sent me out into the night. This was going to be tough, 52miles (or 30 laps) and Steph "The Merciless" in my corner. There was no doubt the job would get done, but exactly how, was a mystery to me. The opening few laps seemed to take ages, they were broken up at each turnaround point with encouragement, humor and music from Chris Williams and the crew and then regular drinks from Steph out of the back of the car along the course. I had assessed I was in 3rd or 4th position, but losing ground on the guys in front. The first time I asked for a lap count was at the far turn around, Chris told me 6, I could have sworn it was 10. I felt very tired and was struggling to keep my eyes open. The opening 10 laps had taken a while and had involved a good deal of walking. My only entertainment at this time was marveling at the speed that Peter was doing his laps, he was flying! It was a convincing display of run strength, and I guess quite distracting to the positions ahead of him.

After 17miles I cautiously mentioned to Steph that I could really do with a "short" sleep, she agreed! So, I got the blanket and climbed into the driving seat, resulting in a 1hr 10 minute nap all told. Steph woke me with chicken soup that had been kindly donated by Renee, and some caffeine tablets. I was then pointed in the direction of the run course, and off I went. With 20 laps to go and 10minutes into lap11 I felt the sleepiness lift and I began to run. My lap times fluttered around the 17-20 minute pace and I felt energized. After a few laps I began to see the race in front of me. I was in 6th spot, with Ghislain 1 or 2 laps in front and Chuck maybe 2 laps back, I needed to maintain my form. I adopted a run/walk strategy, walking just enough to bring down my heart rate and combining this with landmark and competitor targets up the road.



With 25 miles to go I was surprised to broadside Peter, who at this stage was walking and looked to be in a bit of discomfort. We chatted for a while about our plight, and then pushed on. I could see that I was making ground on Ghislain. I managed to go level with him with around 6 to go. Around the same time I had seen Chuck taking time out on the tressle table at the turnaround, which I figured was a sure sign he had given up chasing me. My main focus then became maintaining my position in relation to Ghislain. With 3 to go I lapped Ghislain. Peter had bucked up and was about to cross the line for 3rd. I ticked the last 3 off, got handed the Union Jack and went about crossing the finish line for 4th place in 25hours 26minutes.

I really enjoyed the whole experience, the organization and set-up of the race was excellent. Of particular note was the timing system that was managed by Steve and

John, it was always possible to find out my exact whereabouts in the race, a factor which, to me is paramount when racing ultra multi-lap. It's said that John worked the chip system for 36 hours straight, which emphasizes his pro approach.



The following day we travelled to the awards banquet held at www.whiskeyjoestampa.com It was superb! We had fun hooking up with friends, exchange stories and talking about challenges ahead.

