

Joey Lichter Triple Anvil Race Report

(written on an iPhone in the long car ride home with the crew)

There are marathons. There are triathlons. There are obstacle races.

Then there is the Anvil.

The Anvil comes in different sizes. The Double (4.8 mi swim/224 mi bike/52.4 mi run)

The Triple (7.2 mi swim/336 mi bike/78.6 mi run)

And the Quintuple (12 mi swim/560 mi Bike/131 mi Run).

You might think them impossible, but you'd be surprised. The limits you believe exist only in your mind. Remove them and you are free to find out what you're made of

Having done the Double in Florida back in March, I made the decision to try the Triple. It's a longer race (60 hrs compared to the 36 for the Double) but the clock doesn't stop for you if you decide to sleep or rest so you need to consider strategy. I had my crew of Sarah, Di and Aida and we had met before the race to go over my anticipated splits for the swim, bike and run so we were organized. I actually had printed a poster size chart with that information so they could monitor my progress.

Days leading up to the race:

Drove from Florida on Tuesday the 11th with the hopes of a 14 hr drive split with a 5 hr sleepover in Florence, SC. That would work perfectly to get me into the Anvil race site in Virginia the day before the race at 3pm. Except that isn't what ended up happening. Hurricane Matthew flooded some of Interstate 95, we got rejected from every hotel due to lack of vacancies because of hurricane evacuees. Ended up finding a motel at about 4:30am in Lumberton, NC that did not have running water but had beds so we paid \$75 cash to the hotel manager and slept in the beds and used river water next to the hotel to flush the toilet in the morning when we left at 8am. So 3 hrs of sleep on Tuesday night.

Got to the race site around 3, checked in, met all the other athletes for pre race dinner and race briefing. Also managed to bang my head 3 times against a tiny awning that was above the tables we sat at for the race briefing. Then went to sleep in my tent behind the shelters set up for transition which were not quiet at all and made for about 4 hours of sleep the night before the race.

You really can't make up how unplanned my pre-race planning was unraveling towards

Race day(s):

Short version: everything went better than planned and I finished in 55 hrs and 32 minutes; 2nd out of a group of 7 guys and 1 gal doing the Triple and minimal pain.

Longer version:

Swim 7.2 miles (5hr 8 min)

18 loops of about 630m. Water temp was 70 degrees, wore a sleeveless wetsuit and was warm enough. Planned to swim 6 laps (2.4 miles) and then rest and drink calories from bottles left out on a float by the first buoy (I was using the leftover of some Infinit supplement product I had). As I got done with the first

6, I felt great and stopped, drank half a bottle and ate a 2nd Surge gel. Started to feel colder around lap 9, I figured I needed more calories so I decided to stop earlier at lap 10 and drink the other bottle I had put out by the buoys. This helped tremendously. Note to others if you are not taking in calories during long swims, your body temp will be sure to tell you.

T1: 39 min

Showered up in the bathroom next to the lake. Got dressed on the bike.

Bike 336 miles (27 hrs and 22 minutes)

Have you ever done anything straight for 27 hrs and 22 minutes?

Bike loop is 5.5 miles, with hills, and two stops through the support crew area. 60 total loops.

If this were a Britney Spears song it would be called "Loops I did it again"

The bike to me kinda felt like a 3 part beast:

Part 1) the daytime beginning, fun to ride ~ 100 miles

Part 2) the cold nighttime/frozen early morning hours, not so fun/not fun at all to ride ~ 100 miles

Part 3) the next day morning/early afternoon let's get this shit over with hours ~ 136 miles

Part 1 was fun. Riding the hills, you figured out where the shifting occurs so you could mentally prep those gears in your mind and hit them at the appropriate marks each time. It was probably in the high 60s and my crew was doing amazing with keeping my drinks and food flowing. I was really on a steady diet of Coca Cola mixed with Pedialyte, turkey sandwiches, kit kats, donuts, ramen noodles, bacon egg and cheese sandwiches, and of course water.

Rode the first 100 miles without ever breaking. Great coordination with the crew to throw bottles I was done with and to get new ones as well as eating on the bike the whole time. I had rests on my charts but I opted not to use them. I did add some chamois cream once or twice but these were also coordinated with the crew and lasted no longer than 3-4 minutes.

Part 2 started with a stop to change clothes for the temperature change. Nights would drop into the 40s. This Florida boy never trained once in temps lower than 75 degrees, so I had gear but wasn't sure how some of them felt. I started with a few loops of trying a few pants/jackets combos because nothing felt right. I felt mentally like I wasn't wanting to have some type of clothing that would inhibit movement or increase chafing but I didn't want to be so cold that my legs shook. Finally figured out the right clothing and was riding okay from 9pm-1am.

Then it started to get tough. Tiredness was setting in. The hills were getting steeper. The cold was getting colder. And the lonely was getting lonelier. Teamed up a bit with Laura Knobloch and Michael Ortiz to ride together as a pack to make sure we would keep each other awake. We all did the Florida Double together so we got the gang back together for this.

We weren't pack drafting because that's not allowed and wouldn't even work on those hills, but we rode side by side since the road was empty at that time. It did work to keep each other focused and awake. This is critical or else those tired eyes can turn into crashes.

Finally at about 5am I told my crew I needed my first nap. Eyes were rolling behind my head. I had been up for 22 hrs and still had plenty to go. We fought over how long (love you Sarah) but I got 1 hr in the backseat of our rental van.

Part 3: the let's get this shit over with hours.

You know how sometimes you wake up and know you have to do something you don't want to do, and it's freaking cold, and you're shivering, and you would pay to just close your eyes again, yeah..... so I loaded up on warm gear, hot coffee, got back on the bike and started my last 130 or so miles. Laura and Mike and I continued to ride together. At some point I almost felt like we were the gang from stranger things riding their bikes trying to fight the forces of evil. Feel like the crews in the AnVillage (the transition area where they set up) would see our gang come in and root for us because of our cooperative and team like nature. John Jenkins even wants to join our gang now. We might accept applications. May also have just let myself believe that people loved our gang to enhance the celebratory effect of the end of the bike. Whatever. Whatever works, really. Just keep moving and not swerving and get to the damn run!

Finally finished at about 4pm on Friday and now had about 26 hours left before the cut off to run 3 marathons.

T2: 26 min: got off the bike, changed into clothes for the run, ate some food. Honestly I don't remember this one so much but I am sure what I just wrote was true.

The run: 3 marathons, 78.6 miles, 21 hr and 57 min
Best run I've ever had in a race.

I was actually very excited to run after being on that bike for a whole day. I started out feeling great energy wise. I had some knee cap issues that I worked on with some massage and pain meds as I came into T2.

First marathon was going great until the end of it around 1am and 2am. The sleep deprivation hallucinations were kicking in big time. At first I was seeing flashes of what appeared to be marketing advertisements everywhere in my view. Unintelligible product names. I wonder if it was a result of seeing all the foods on my support crew table and just thinking of them and then having them appear in my sight but in some warped indecipherable code. It was weird. Not debilitating but I would have to blink a bunch to make it go away.

The scary hallucinations happened at about 2am when the asphalt road I was looking down at while running was now forming sentences to send me messages. There were patterns of lines in the asphalt that were forming into letters and then into sentences and were telling me "this is stupid" "you are damaging your body" "this road is ugly why are you running on this?" I started to forget why I was doing

what I was doing. Felt like the road was trying to tell me something. Was it the ghost of the Anvil past? These messages were making sense to me at the time and yet somehow I knew something was wrong. I came back to my shelter round 2am and told coach Di word for word "I'm losing it, I need sleep." Went into my tent and before I knew it Di was waking me up with hot tomato soup and grilled cheese at about 2:45am. I was reluctant to say the least but I got up. That tomato soup was amazing too. Ate some food, put my headlamp on and some warmer clothes and got ready for marathon 2.

Something happened as I started marathon 2. I ran. Fast. The last two marathons were both probably about 7 hrs or so. That's fast for being the tail end of an ultra. Most people were walking it like a death march of sorts. It's not because they don't enjoy running but the body starts to fail ya. But I found that when I ran my body could handle it. Yes it was painful but it wasn't debilitating me. I just ran with pain. I eventually had to sit in a chair midway through marathon 2 to close my eyes at 5am because delirium was causing my eyes to roll around a bit and I knew how good I felt after I slept at 2am so I took a brief nap at 5:30 am.

For the final marathon which started for me around 7am, I came into my shelter and declared that I was running the entire last marathon. I put on my usual training gear. Just shorts and a visor and put on a new pair of shoes and socks. Other racers were asking me if I was cold and I wasn't. I ran hot. I know Dave Jepsen can appreciate that (he took 1st in the Quintuple with good competition from Johan Taz Desmet, fun to watch that and kudos to both of you awesome ultra athletes, who also both came back after resting to see the end of the race and cheer others on... but I digress)

The last marathon I ran. As fast as I could muster. Actually as fast as my inhaler would allow me to run. The crisp Virginia air had me holding my inhaler in my right hand like some sort of running baton. But it worked. My fastest marathon of the 3. Smiling, encouraging others, getting a lot of support from the rest of the field. Did the last loop as a beer mile (or 1.75 mile) with the amazing crew who helped me out. Was really fun to share that with them. We high fived everyone else of whom all the Double and Triple folks finished and most of the Quint people.

Finished around 2:30 pm on Saturday.

55 hr and 21 minutes.

2nd place overall for Triple.

Huge smiles and elation like you wouldn't believe.

Took a shower at the park and stuck around to cheer all the other racers, including Roni who came up to do his first Double and had such a challenging but successful race. Feel like he learned more about himself at this race than anywhere else.

My cousins came down from DC to see me and it was great to get hugs from the nieces. Thank you so much Dahlia and Gio for bringing the kids to see me. Sorry if I wasn't all together. I hope you had a good time seeing the madness first hand.

Most popular question I'm getting asked today: how do I feel physically?

I'm a little beat up. Knees are a bit achy and my shins have some inflammation. But these shall pass.

Really I feel amazing. I feel like i was just surrounded by superhumans who are willing to test the limits of physical strength because they aren't afraid. They aren't challenged enough by the monotony of everyday drive to work, sit in a cubicle, dinner with the husband/wife and kids and TV life that so many people settle for.

I feel like I just took a road trip with some of the funniest, kindest, most loving crew you could ever ask for. Sarah, Diane, Aida and Roni are incredible people and made having a great race even greater.

Getting to chat it up with all the athletes (new and returning) was another highlight for me. I learn so much from all of you. It's a beautiful thing.

Also realized that in the last 6 days I didn't hear the word Trump or Clinton once. I didn't hear about ISIS, Health Care (unless it dealt with patellar issues or blisters) and the only drones discussed were the ones filming it all. The NY Times had reporters on site and I look forward to reading their report on what happens at the Anvil.

Until the next one, thanks to all who made that race possible. Taz said to Kirby, the Race Director, that people like us need a person like him who puts together such a great family type event for us to learn about ourselves in such a supportive and safe manner. Couldn't have said it better. Thanks again Kirb and Teri and Jade and the rest of the staff.

Had a blast and we'll see ya in Florida with a whole lot of the TriDi crew.



