

UK Ironman 2010 Race Report by Jason Briley

I will cut straight to the point and tell you all that I am officially an "IRONMAN" having completed the 2nd toughest Ironman in Europe. This report is written to everyone who has sponsored and supported me but who may not too much about triathlon.

Here are some stats from the day

10,000 calories Burnt

1000 approximate amount of times I smiled and said "thank you" to supporters

1000 approximate amount of times I smiled and thanked the marshals and police

2000 approximate amount of times I said to myself "I can't smile anymore" - but still did.

198 is the amount of cyclist I overtook on the cycle

140.6 amount of miles I travelled using only my body-power and no engines.

22 bites of flapjack (homemade secret recipe) eaten

15 hrs 13 minutes is the time it took me to complete the Ironman

1 hr 47 minutes – amount of time I beat my goal by.

14 hours - my next Ironman mission

10 litres of Water / Gatorade / Flat coke drunk

10 Litres of fluid out via sweat and bladder

30 stops on the run to let fluid out.

6 Bannanas eaten on the Marathon

8 amount of times nearly burst into tears

5 amount of times I **actually** burst into tears

4 big mouthfuls of Honey consumed on the Cycle

1.5 Minced beef and onion pasties eaten . the other half went to team mate

0 punctures (Yay)

1 very proud man with **1** very good reason to get **1** hard earned tattoo.

RACE REPORT

1 week to go

I could not wait to get up to Bolton and get this race started and under way. I felt that I had done enough training to get across the line about 6 weeks previously and felt like I was just time wasting until the event. This time was hard to stay focused as I just wanted to go and do it. But the good thing was that I wasn't nervous at all. I actually loved the feeling of taking on my first Ironman. The more people got nervous around me from the club or on the forums, the more it seemed to help re-enforce my own positivity and excitement. I always seem to be like this. I can only liken it to looking forward to a Festival that you have had tickets for months in advance and can't wait to get there.

Travel to Bolton

Me, wife Hilary, son Codi (16) and daughter Harmony (15) travelled up in the car on the Friday morning around 11am for what should have been a 3.5 hour journey. but after spending time on the M6 (the biggest car park in the UK) this had turned into almost 6 hours. I was still determined to be positive though and the hotel was really nice which helped. It was fully booked out by the Ironman staff, pro athletes, age groupers and 1st-timers like me. The "festival vibe" really kicked in for me here with strangers talking to strangers in lifts and at the bar, all swapping tips, stories and telling of their own ironman hopes and dreams. This was a great place to be 2 days before my event. We met up with friends of the club and other club members here and helped each other out all weekend.

Day Before Race

I had to rack my bike at Transition 1 next to the lake behind the hotel at 9 am. I did this, and also racked my bike bag on my peg. I was number 62 so it meant my bike was opposite the top 10 pro's bikes which was a little daunting but really funny because it was so surreal. I found out later that the 2 bikes either side of me finished in 3rd and 4th place overall. This is when I met one of the top 5 Pro athletes Donna Phelan from Canada. As I just finished putting my £300 bike up she looked at me with puppy eyes and said do I know anything about brakes? I said I know all about my cheap brakes but not too sure about the ones on her bike (must have been worth around £8000 to £10,000). I promised to try and help her though, so we had a look and a chat and I eventually got an official to help out. She was very grateful and she promised to catch up with me later.

Chat With Pro-Ironman Triathlete Donna Phelan

Well, she kept her promise and we ended up eating together and chatting several times through out the weekend. It was great to meet someone so accomplished but so down to earth, it was awesome for me and very inspiring. We chatted like old friends. She loved my "Fatman to Ironman" story and as she had travelled over from her training camp in Switzerland alone and was grateful for the company and the chance to share lifts if needed. We met again the next day for one of the highlights of my race, but more on that later.

Race Day

I got up at 4am after a relatively decent 5 hour sleep and went to the specially laid on ironman breakfast with teammate Paul Venus. We ate porridge and Danish pastries and as we sat down Donna was there and invited us over for a pre-race chat. She was feeling confident and told us we would be fine also. What a great start to the biggest challenge of my life.

Pre-Start

Myself and Paul Venus walked over to the bike transition with families in tow to get our bike tyres pumped up, do some final checks and then join the mass exodus down to the water, but as we got closer the MC was telling everyone to start making their way to the exit for the march. I started sprinting to get my tyres done on time and then threw my kit over the fence to Hilary and then joined the back of the queue with the other Andover Tri team mates. The walk down was only 400 metres but slow as there was over 1000 triathletes. This was good though as I got to talk and laugh with my family some more. Finally at the waters edge I kissed them goodbye and got into the water.

My Ironman Plan

My whole strategy was to forget all about the speeds I was capable of and just stay under the times needed for each discipline. To take my time in transitions and not to worry about the finishing time as long as it was sub 17. I was adamant about not hitting the wall by keeping my heart rate as low as possible while refuelling regularly. But most importantly I wanted to enjoy as much of it as humanly possible.

The swim – 2.4miles or 3.8Km

I stayed right at the back in the water and when the horn went off I thought it was pre warning, but 1000 people sprang into action in front of me, so I thought, "I better start swimming as well then". Being at the back was awesome. It did take me 3 ½ minutes to cross the start line but I didn't get bashed about at all. I got into my stroke straight away with no panicking. I felt much slower than usual so expected to get a time of around 2 hours. Lap 1 took about 51 mins and lap 2 only 50 mins. This meant I did the whole thing really efficiently but with a low HR and still matched my training pace. I was over the moon. I did it in 1hr 41 mins. I climbed out of the water and onto the carpet to amazing cheers from the crowd, kissed all my family, posed for photos, got the crowd cheering some more in my usual "ex-DJ, show -off" fashion and then made my way to transition.

T1

Well , I planned to take my time here and I certainly did, I got changed in about 5 mins then proceeded to chat to all the marshalls who recognised me from the weekend about how good my swim was and were telling me the rest will all be fine. Then I heard over the sound system "Paul Venus from Andover", so I thought I had beat him out of the water so I waited for him to come in so we could start the cycle together. I ate more flapjacks and waited, around 7 minutes later I decided to leave. As I grabbed my bike and stepped out of transition, more cheers and the MC started telling my story of "fatman to Ironman" and I got even

more cheers. I kissed all my family again and that's when Clare (Pauls Partner) told me that he had already gone out but was in a bad way. She asked me to catch him up and sort his head out. I agreed and went off. I chuckled to myself for waiting for a mate who was being welcomed onto the bike course by the announcer, the photos are quite funny, I am just wandering around transition, chilling out with the Ironman race going on all around me. Brilliant.

Bike – 112miles or 180km

This course takes you uphill for a good 16 miles to the point where you start 3 x 30'ish mile loops, then a it's a couple of mile back in to the run transition. I promised my self I would take it easy and not get caught up in my usual speeds as this is my strongest discipline and I didn't want to use all my energy before the run and not be able to finish. So this is exactly what I did, I kept to a steady 15mph average and even enjoyed the up hills. It was fairly hilly for the first half but nothing like some of the training rides I have been on with Dave Hall, Chris Thompson and the lads. But everyone around me really seemed to suffer on the big climb much more than me. I loved that. It was beautiful up the top, a really inspiring backdrop. I took it all in as much as I could to keep my mind from "dark thoughts". I got to the nice flat 8 mile stretch and passed someone who announced himself as Andy. He said he was following my blog and was inspired. He also knew a friend from the site. Jenny Cass who was also doing it for the first time but she was pulled out of the race during the swim for panicking and having real difficulty. I was gutted as we have been chatting for a year now. But I thought I need to finish this race now. I know she wants me to do it, to prove to her it can be done. I forged on ahead and wished him luck. Loop one went well and as I came back to the bottom of the big climb, all the friends and triathlon-wags and Ironman-widows had congregated there to cheer everyone. As I came up to them it was like a scene from the Tour de France. The noise was amazing, so I put my hand up to me ear and said "What? I can't hear you". That was it, the crowd took it up another level, the noise was even more amazing. I had such a rush from that, this was the first time that I nearly cried. On my second loop just as I got to the easy 8 mile stretch my friend Donna Phelan (the pro from the hotel) overtook me and shouted in her Canadian accent "come on Jay, lets go. You're looking real strong on the bike, lets go, go, go". That was it, another rush of blood to the head and I was up with her. We took it in turns to take the lead from each other and overtook loads of people at an average of 20-25mph. This was awesome, I felt like I was in a film or something. We were just belting it on the same mission for about 20 minutes. What's more amazing was, she was in 2nd place at the time and a whole lap ahead of me. At times I thought I was holding her back, but it seems that I wasn't. I then realised that I could probably have got away with my usual 16 – 17.5 mph pace for the whole of the bike and still been ok. I didn't care though. The inclines started again and it was time to let her go off into the distance and finish her race. We wished each other well and parted. This was the second time I got choked up and had a little tear in my eye. Donna didn't know it, but she had just become one of my sporting heroes in an instant. I will think about that 20 minute ride always from now on when I am tired.

So it was back to my own race, I had been going on the bike for 3.5 hours and was half way. This was quite mentally challenging as I looked at my watch which confirmed I started the swim 5.5 hours earlier, I had half the bike to go and still hadn't even thought about running the Marathon yet. Very daunting, but in my usual style i got my chirpy little head on and turned it all into a positive, just concentrating on 5 miles at a time on the bike as this is when I ate

and drank religiously. My home made flapjacks were awesome and the honey from Tesco's was perfect instead of energy gels.

Onto my last lap and I had to watch the people in front of me split off as they had finished while I had to turn left up the hill climb again and complete a final 30 odd mile loop. Just as I was thinking "oh sod it, I'm bored on the bike now" I go past this guy on a nice bike with a yellow jersey on who proclaims to know who the voice is behind him. Yes, it was my good friend Paul Venus. I had kept my promise to Claire, I had caught him up, even if it did take me 80 miles. Now it was time to see where his mind was at. It became clear he was a little fed up like me, so I told him we were going to stop at the top of the hill for a nature break, also I insisted he have half my pasty and some of my iprobrufen as his back and neck were sore. This was a good plan apart from my nature break turned from a quick pee in a bush to something that would take a little longer if you know what I mean. There was no where to hide on top of this mountain so all the others coming past could just see my head and eyes popping out over the long grass like a scared rabbit. This cracked up the motorcycle marshals who had stopped to hold my bike for me. We did laugh a lot and I climbed back on and we made our way to finish the loop. That break took another 15 minutes but was well worth it. Paul told me to go on as he started to suffer again but was definitely within the cut-off time. So I put my foot down. A couple of miles later and my chain flicked off so I had to stop and put it back on. I jumped back on and shot off again. As I came toward the end of the final loop I was on my own and nearly started crying again, I was so happy and proud to make the bike cut-off. This is what all my training had been for over the last 12 months, just to get to the run on time and deal with it when I got there. I pulled myself together, then got choked up again immediately, pulled myself together yet again and finished my cycling mission. To be honest if I had let myself go I could have had a proper full on, self-pride induced cry. But I thought I need to wait until I have done the marathon for that. I came into the run transition very happy to get off the bike but still very chirpy also.

T2

I grabbed my stuff and started changing into run kit. Trainers on, cap on, more sun screen, eat another pasty, chat to everyone and go. Then I heard "Oi Briley", it was Paul again. So I waited for him to get changed so we could run the marathon together. This is why my transition went up from 7 minutes to 15. But I didn't care it was nice to start the hardest part of the race with someone you can trust and have a good laugh with.

Run – 26.2mile or 42km Marathon

Well, it was time to do my first marathon ever. This was quite amusing as we ran about 20meters up the muddy hill out of transition, looked at each other and burst out laughing and just started walking. Saying "who are we kidding, there will be no running up hills, we will walk them and run the flats and down hills". This was the plan and we stuck to it. I think we did really well and our running form was so much better than others around us. Some people actually looked crippled with cramp and injuries. At the 3 mile point we overtook a tall younger fitter looking lad and we did our usual checking if people were ok and he replied "No...im f@£ked" in a deep Scottish accent. "do you mind if I run with you for a bit, you sound like you're having a good time", we agreed and tried to cheer him up. It was nice concentrating on someone else instead of our own problems. It was only a few miles before he perked up and our duo, became firmly cemented

as a trio. This new member was coming all the way with us, and what a laugh we had. We thanked every marshal supporter and athlete along the way, we laughed, joked and arsed about. We forced each other to eat and drink even when we didn't want to and forged a lifelong friendship right there. Steven McClean was his name and he was on his first IM too. Every so often we would see other Andover trathletes and friends coming the opposite way and would stop for a morale-boosting man-hug. Tears in eyes each time. When I got to mile 16 I turned to the lads and said " Oh dear, my Ironman race has just started". This was the first time I stopped smiling. I had to dig deep as we had just hit the finish line for the first time and seeing all out families and supporters. This really cheered me up, but it was short lived as we watched other people finish and was then turned around as we still had over a 10 mile loop to do. This was tough, really tough. But we knew we had plenty of time. We were going to smash the 17 hour time limit. We just needed to agree a new strategy of picking out landmarks to run too and walk too. This worked very well but bought our average pace right down. It did the trick for me and Paul as at mile 20 we kept speeding up while Steve kept fading. He told us to go on as he had over 3 hours to do 6 miles and thanked us for getting him this far. He told us were the reason he would become an Ironman that day. We hugged and went on. Me and Paul were on a roll and sped up all the way to the 23 mile point where we stopped for more water and bananas. We chatted to the crew and laughed, then into the view came Steve. He had kicked his own butt in to catching us up. I told everyone and everybody cheered him in. I said to him I couldn't believe the grit and determination he just showed and like a line from braveheart or something he just said in his jock accent... " I'm not beat yet, this hasn't beaten me, I'm not beat yet. Let' finish this thing." He had water in his eyes and his face was all flushed. I knew he was on his emotional and physical limits and I really experienced what the Ironman was all about at that point. In fact I am welling up having just read this back, right now. It's bringing it all back. But, back to the story. He wanted to crack on, so we did.. This was the second time today I felt like I was a movie set. It was the most amazing feeling.

Just 3 miles to go and 2 more water stops. Just after the last water stop we were clapping other athletes still on their way back out with 8 miles to go when we noticed someone in the middle of the street with a luminous green jacket on. I said "who is that?" then Paul told me it was Codi, my son. I sprinted up to him to give him a cuddle. I asked him why was he miles away from the finish line and he said "dad" you are closer thank you think. It's just down a hill and around a couple of corners. All four of us ran together. Our final turn was upon us, we all shook hands and hugged. We let Steve go first for his photo, than Paul went. Me last. My Daughter Harmony, came to meet me. We hugged and I cried. She said "hold on dad, we need to find mum. So we ran down the street hand in hand and she led me onto the red carpet. I was panicking as I couldn't find Hilary in the crowds and I didn't want to cross the line without finding her first. Eventually I found her and hugged. At that moment every cold, wet, early morning training session, every 7 hour cycle, my battle with food, the 5 stone weight loss, my battle with drugs and drink that went on into my 30's and the last 15 hours all hit me at once and I properly sobbed into her arms. I was stood at the side of the red carpet not caring about the time ticking away. This was my moment and I wanted to share it with the one person that has always supported me 100%. My wife Hilary. She wiped my tears and said "go finish this race, Jay....it is actually a race you know". So I turned to the finish line, looked up at the massive video screen and did my 3 cartwheels that I had promised all my sponsors and ran over the line. I burst into tears again. Job done in **15hours 13 minutes and 24 seconds.**

Back at home

When I got back in Andover me and Paul went on a mission to find a tattooist who could do the finishers tattoo for us on the Tuesday. We both got slightly different designs on different parts of the leg. They look awesome, and every time I look at it I get a warm feeling knowing that a big fat guy said he was going to do something really tough and then went and did it. Then I realise that guy was me.

Thankyou

If any of you are thinking of doing the Ironman challenge, I would say don't talk about it. Sign up a year in advance and just do it. But I would also say you would only get half the experience if you didn't have the support of family, friends and even a club. Hilary, Codi and Harmony have been amazing through out this. And seeing them on the course truly makes a difference to the next hour or 2 of your race after you see them. The Andover Tri Wags and families truly made the whole weekend amazing. Thank you all. I feel like we have made some friends for life.

With all your help I raised over £2500 for Help for heroes and Cancer research. Thank you.

The Future?

Family time and money permitting I would do another one next year. But I have to be fair. So I may do the same distance non Ironman branded event to see if I can go sub 14 hours. I am sure I can by simply slimming down transitions and rests and speeding up a bit on the bike alone.

Then in 2011 I would like to do an Ironman in Europe and go for a proper Personal Best, maybe even sub 13hours. Anyone want to join me?