

I am still alive after yesterdays Tough Guy race, despite only stopping shivering a few hours ago...

I can honestly say that unless you actually do this race (of which I would like to add I will never put myself through again) there is no way anyone will ever be able to appreciate how mentally and physically demanding this event is on the human body. Many events like to give themselves names to try to represent the race they hold but few can actually really mean it, HellRunner, is an enjoyable 10-12 mile cross country run with smiles and fun on the agenda and a few water splashes but in no way is it Hell lets face it. Tough Guy on the other hand is exactly what it says, Tough... The run itself is pretty much a normal cross country run for 8 country miles, undulating, couple of obstacles to tackle and the infamous hill of which they send you up and down consecutively 15 times which kill your calves also steep enough to require the use of hands to get up in parts. The obstacle course, however, is completely another animal, designed to destroy you mentally, mainly through the extreme cold temperatures. The water parts (which made up about 75% of the course) had 1/2 inch of ice on it which they were using chainsaws to break up before the first runners went through. Again the first taste of this was an in and out affair 20 times over into a man made ditch about 10 feet across with 3 foot vertical sides and water that got progressively deeper (up to arm pits at one point) for about 100 metres in length. By the 5th in and out, my legs felt like someone was pouring boiling water over them, the water hurt that much I could only "man up" and try to prepare myself for the other water bits ahead.

With this section out of the way we then entered the Behemoth, a 40 foot high log climb which when you cant feel your feet, legs or hands, made it pretty sketchy to say the least, I completely s**t myself when I lost my footing at the top of one of the climbs and seriously thought my time was up. Getting down was no fun either. A few more deeper water splashes, concrete tunnels only just big enough to literally drag yourself through which ripped your knees and numerous monkey ropes about 30 feet up in the air later and everything was screaming. I was so cold and shivering uncontrollably, at one point my brother (who ran with me) and I looked at each other and couldn't speak, we just laughed hysterically at each other!!

The next 45 mins were probably the worst I have endured in my life...

The main water obstacles were just horrendous, insanely cold and many required you to submerge completely which after the 4th dunking in the space of 30 seconds my head was screaming out to me to stop this madness, I literally did not know where I was, who I was or what the hell I was doing!!! The final straw for me was a walk the plank and jump off into brown muddy water 15 feet below me, I literally tip toe'd along the 10 foot plank and edged towards the end where I knew I had to jump off. My legs were so cold and my concentration so depleted I literally fell into the water below which took my breath away instantly rendering me helpless. I couldn't swim, float, speak or move. Somehow I got myself together and got to the exit point where I was checked by one of the many St John's crew for signs of hypothermia (my lips were blue!!) Emotional but cracking a half smile I was deemed ok to continue...straight into a further deep water section where I went in face first again having lost my footing on some monkey ropes when around 5 of us started swaying and all ended up in the drink. At this point it wasn't funny anymore, it took my breath away again and I panicked, I could see one of the "lifeguards" about 10 meters away in his deep sea diving suit but for the life of me I couldn't call out to him to help me...literally the words were not coming out and I seriously thought I was going to drown. Eventually someone behind me realised I was in trouble and helped me up and I gasped

much needed air into my lungs. Not content with this we were then subjected to crawling under barbed wire, face first in more mud and water, over some rather large obstacles and just as the finish was in sight more water...deep wading water. At this point I had pretty much lost the will to even care and plunged in and got to the finish area in a total time of 2hours 30 mins.

Covered in foil blankets both my brother and I (along with everyone else) stood there shivering violently and uncontrollably. We were given hot chocolate and stood once again laughing in hysterics as we shook pretty much all of the hot drinks everywhere. I literally could not stop shivering for the rest of the day and dare say that the line between being ok and suffering from hypothermia was pretty fine.

Now as I sit here in a warm office reflecting, bruised, covered from head to foot in scuffs and scratches, aching all over and still a little chilly with a headache and sore throat, I realise that the sense of achievement I have is immense. I have completed what is billed as one of the most extreme and hardest races on the planet and can now fully appreciate why this is. When I chatted to Shaun (a repeat offender of tough guy) on Saturday at the AGM he told me, and I hope he doesn't mind me saying, that he had tears in his eyes the first time he did Tough Guy, I too experienced the same. Completely battered and mentally drained at what I had just put myself through the tears were welling up. All I could think about was how I wanted to be warm again and how I will never put myself through this again!!!!

In all seriousness, I probably wont do it again but I would say that this is definitely something that should be done once in your lifetime, one to tick off the list and be able to proudly say "I did it", "I am officially a Tough Guy"