

2006 Barbados Bunbury Triathlon: A Local Success Story

By Raf Baugh

Speaking with Allan Holmes, champion Bunbury triathlete and race director for the 2006 Barbados Bunbury Triathlon, two weeks prior to the race and the stress was visible. Concerns were abound that with two races on Australia day and the Perth National Series event a week later that many athletes would bypass the Bunbury race. Fortunately, as the event drew closer, concerns abated as entries started to roll in and competitor numbers exceeded 150 on race day.

The Bunbury Triathlon has a rich history dating back to the 80's and it was fantastic that many of the volunteers and athletes who were present in 2006 have contributed to the events' success over the preceeding 20 years. The healthy state of the Bunbury Triathlon Club was also apparent both in terms of range of competitors from social to elite who competed and also the range of sponsors and members who assisted in making the event possible.

In racing terms, the Pura Milk Classic Distance event featured a very even woman's field headlined by Loretta Wesley, Kelly Mouttet- Exeter, Kerrie Bailie, Claire Goldsmith, Kylie English, EJ Davies and Ebony Malone and a top heavy men's field with new Bunbury resident and Toohey's Blue veteran, Chippy "Van Halen" Slater, up against the likes of Steve Bishop, Brynt McSwain, super swimmer Ryan Mason and the ever consistent Ron Sammut.

From the outset, Mason, Slater and Bishop cleared out in the swim and opened a handy break on the field. The bike proved decisive in the men's event, as Bishop suffered a nasty crash in the first meters of the bike and Mason was unable to follow Slater as he tore around the 6 lap bike circuit with his tear drop helmet and carbon Softride. With Bishop out of the race, Brynt McSwain used his characteristically strong bike to work through the field on the bike and close in on the leaders, as a chase pack of Sammut, Paul McSweeney, Paul Zani and Alan Kuipers-Chan formed behind him.

In the ladies field, Ebony Malone was followed out of the water by a steady stream of 10 contenders all within the space of three minutes. As Malone, local NZ Ironman aspirant EJ Davies and Kylie English started to push the bike pace, race favourite Kelly Mouttet suffered a puncture and had to return to transition for a replacement wheel, effectively ending her race. Just behind the three leaders Kerrie Bailie and Loretta Wesley pushed the pace past Claire Goldsmith as the wind began to whip up strongly from the North East.

As the Classic race continued, the leaders of the Lyondell Sprint were heading towards the finish line. Some fantastic racing saw emerging Bunbury junior Ryan Bailie surge well clear of Tristan Hellings on the final half of the run course. The whippet like Bailie may well be a strong contender at the National All Schools Championships in Portarlington, Victoria as demonstrated by his poise and efficiency in taking victory. In

the woman's race, Alisa Lindsay-Rae demonstrated great strength on the bike and run as she managed to hold off a strong and consistent challenge from early leader Amy Hancock. This tight racing saw the ladies cross the line in 3rd and 4th place overall ahead of 3rd place male Scott Prest, with Nadia Atanasovski taking third in the female division.

Onto the run of the Pura Milk Classic distance event, the men's race was done and dusted with Slater looking strong and holding a massive lead of over 2 minutes. Mason looked to be moving well off the bike in second but was being pursued strongly by McSwain. The ladies field was still wide open as Davies, Malone and English changed pedals for flats within 20 seconds of one another and Bailie and Wesley chased hard from 3 and 4 minutes back respectively. As Slater marched on to victory, McSwain caught and passed Mason on the second 5km lap and Ron Sammut had cleared away from the chase pack to be clear in 4th place. The positions remained that way to the finish with Slater dipping under the 2 hour barrier with a time of 1.59.54.

In the ladies event, Davies showed the strength of her Ironman preparation as she pulled away for a comfortable victory over English, fast finishing Loretta Wesley and Ebony Malone. In the tussle for 5th and 6th Kerry Bailie just managed to hold on by one second from a surging Claire Goldsmith.

With local victors in the Classic Distance, a successful, well attended event and outstanding community support full credit must go the Bunbury Triathlon Club for the way in which they promote and develop the sport of Triathlon in the region. Special praise to Race Director Allan Holmes and his great team of supporters, without whom the race would not be possible.

Regards
Raf Baugh