



Strong run: Courtney Atkinson leads Gareth Halverson in the City of Perth triathlon yesterday. Atkinson cleared out to win by a minute. Picture: Mal Fairclough

Atkinson takes the hard road

DAVE HUGHES

Courtney Atkinson yesterday pushed himself to a third consecutive win in the City of Perth triathlon to retain his national Olympic-distance title.

Atkinson, 29, is deliberately pushing himself in a hectic racing schedule in Australia to prepare for the new \$3 million, eight-race world championship series which climaxes at the Gold Coast in September.

He was, therefore, delighted with his slick time of 1hr 46min. 17sec. in the midday heat.

"I'm not racing anyone but myself at the moment," he said after burning off Australian Institute of Sport athlete Gareth Halverson by a minute in the second half of the 10km run along the city foreshore.

"I set a strong pace and then tried to hold it, just good, hard even-paced running."

Sixteen competitors were bunched at the end of the 40km cycle but only Halverson had the legs to go with Atkinson.

He surrendered to the pace after 5km but finished second after holding off Queensland's James Seear by 45sec.

By his top-five finish, Seear gained automatic selection for the world under-23 titles at the Gold Coast.

Perth was Atkinson's third hard race in five weeks — and he hasn't let up on a demanding training program to peak for any of them.

Two wins and a second have convinced him his strategy is correct and he believes superior stamina will enable him to challenge in Mooloolaba, on Sunday week, those who skipped Perth to taper.

"I'm not at all fresh because of all the hard racing and training at the start of this year," he said.

"I'll take it a bit easier now and see what I can do in a fortnight."

Mooloolaba is the start of the second-tier World Cup series, with the next at Ishigaki, Japan, a month later.

Atkinson will contest both to hone himself for the first of the world championship races in South Korea in early May.

Annabel Luxford also waited for the run to destroy the opposition.

She was one of four riders to lead the race into the final transition but cracked on the pace as soon as she pulled on her running shoes to leave the others to squabble over the minor places.

Luxford clocked 1:59:38, 1:42 ahead of Japan's Sakimoto Tomoko. Perth's Felicity Sheedy-Ryan was not in the leading group off the bike but made up a lot of time and finish third in 2:3:38.