

Remarkable veteran has ironman race to himself

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Bet on it: Bob Southwell will have plenty of puff to blow out the candles on his 80th birthday cake next month. Lung function just isn't a concern when you cycle 300km, run 25km and swim 6km a week.

Southwell is the oldest entrant for Sunday's Ironman WA at Busselton and, going on past form, he should have little trouble completing the 3.8km swim, 180km cycle and 42.2km run inside the 17-hour limit.

The Sydney phenomenon took up ultra-distance triathlons aged 55 and subsequently won his age group at the world titles in Hawaii. Odds are he'll repeat the achievement on Sunday — he's the only representative in the over-75 category.

More than six decades separate Southwell from the event's youngest competitor, 18-year-old novice Holly Sutton. The Sydney teenager plans to

cover the course alongside her mother, Gabrielle Shearman, who is also attempting the event for the first time.

At the opposite end of the experience scale is Canada's John Wragg, 58. No one in the world has finished more ironman events than the Toronto teacher and success on Sunday will take his tally to an astonishing 106.

A pair of Beijing Olympics rowers will test their endurance. Men's lightweight four crew members Ben Cureton of WA — a silver medallist in Athens in 2004 — and Rod Chisholm of NSW will test the theory that rowers make good cyclists and vice versa because both sports demand strong thighs, warming up for their six or so hours in the saddle with a swim and running out any stiffness with a standard marathon.

Former AFL umpire Grant Vernon will also return to Busselton to try to improve on his 11hr. 30min. last year.

Sunday's race starts at 6am.