

RACE REPORT

Courtney Ogden - Ironman Canada 2009

After my DNF in the Lake Stevens event on August 16th, I have to be honest and say that my confidence was dented. I was hoping that my poor showing in Lake Stevens was due to jetlag and not something else, but I was never one hundred percent sure.

I had no excuses for the Canada event.

Two weeks in Penticton would be adequate to acclimatise to the warm conditions (over 30 degrees most days) and by race day I had been close to three weeks in the US, so jetlag could not be a factor.

I was also very comfortable with my home stay hosts, Cathy and Harold Daradics. They have hosted me each time I have raced the Canada event and they have shown incredible hospitality each time. I helped out with the dishes on most occasions and cooked one meal for the household, but apart from that, it was like living with my parents again.

It is a luxury being able to train and focus on the race without the hassle of having household duties to attend to.

It is also good to get some support from the local triathlon community and in this regard I have to extend a big thank you to The Bike Barn in Penticton.

I emailed Will Pratt two weeks prior to arriving in the US asking if I could hire a set of training wheels from The Bike Barn to use for two weeks prior to the race. It would save me the inconvenience of carrying both training and racing wheels in my luggage.

Will replied in the affirmative and let me use the wheels for no charge. Further, I was pleasantly surprised when Will's father, an avid photographer, forwarded some fine race day shots of me a couple of days after the event.

I was relatively pleased with the final two weeks of training in Penticton in the lead up to the event. While I never felt great in any session, my perception was that my fitness did progress in the right direction as race day approached.

Prior to the start I went through the usual routine of a brief swim warm up which consisted of about ten minutes total swimming with some race pace intervals interspersed throughout. I then took a look around to see where Luke Bell was as I wanted to wish him good luck, being a fellow Aussie, and I also wanted to stand right next to him for the start.

I did find Luke and after wishing him good luck, I stood right beside him for the start. I am not quite sure what he thought about that, but I know that he is used to it and probably didn't bat an eyelid.

I was hoping that I would be able to hang with the group that Luke would be swimming with for the duration of the swim. That, however, was a big ask, as I have never been able to do it in the past. In my favour was the fact that I was using a brand new Blue Seventy wetsuit and goggles, kindly provided by Blue Seventy on the Friday prior to the race (there was nothing else in my favour) Blue Seventy also provided a Point Zero Three skin suit to use in Hawaii and I must extend a big thank you to Guy and John from Blue Seventy for their generosity.

When the race started, I was surprised to find that Luke didn't swim off as fast as I thought he would and I could sight his different coloured swimming cap just ahead for the first few hundred metres of the swim. At this point though, a gap started to form between the swimmer in front of me and the rest of the pack.

I had a decision to make - try to bridge the gap myself, or drop off and stay with the slower group. In this instance, I chose to try and bridge the gap, and, after what felt like an eternity of maximal effort swimming, I managed to get onto the feet of the last swimmer in the group.

Almost as if on cue, there was a surge within the group and I was immediately dropped off the feet I had just killed myself to reach. This must have been the feet of the group that included Luke, Aigroz, Guembel, Boecherer, and Lavelle. At this point of the swim, Van Akkeren, who was first out of the water, probably had established a clear lead at the head of proceedings.

As the group slowly pulled away, I was left swimming with one other athlete, who seemed to be in the same position as myself, and I took the opportunity to take a breather by jumping on his feet.

All this happened in the first 1600 metres of the swim, prior to reaching the first turnaround buoy of the single loop out and back course.

The feet I was swimming on were those of Thomas Hellriegel and I stayed on his feet for the 450 metre journey across the top end of the course and then a further 200 or so metres beyond the second turnaround buoy on the way back to transition.

There were still 1600 metres to swim at this point and, as I was comfortable sitting on Thomas's feet, I decided it was time to take a turn at the front and try to minimise the time lost to the athletes in front.

What I couldn't understand was the fact that Thomas didn't sit on my feet as I pulled up alongside during the initial pass. He just swam alongside for as long as he could before dropping back before we exited. I really respected him for that - it meant that we both probably swam a bit faster as a result.

For me, it was a 1600 metre time trial to the finish and got out of the water pretty fatigued. The wade and run at the end of the swim was a nightmare, it felt like I was climbing a flight of stairs to exit the water.

I looked at the clock as I ran into T1 and it showed slightly less than 51 minutes. I was satisfied with my efforts in the water - it was the fastest I had swum this course in the three years I had competed and I later found out that I was only about 2 minutes behind the main group, definitely a manageable gap over the full distance.

I spent the majority of the first ten kilometres of the cycle recovering from the swim. In this time three athletes overtook me and cycled off into the distance. The first was fellow Aussie, Gavin Scott, who happened to be sharing my home stay accommodation. Gavin is one of the nice guys within the ranks of the professionals - totally unassuming, considerate and respectful and a promising young athlete with a bright future.

As Gav went by he said "Hellriegel and Rapp are just behind us" mistakenly believing that I had the means to do anything about it. I said nothing because I couldn't breathe and watched him cycle off into the distance. I was thinking at that point that maybe Gav was going a little bit too hard, but gave him the benefit of the doubt and thought that I would see him on the run course (as I ran passed him - ha ha) later in the day.

The next to go by was Hellriegel, soon followed by Rapp, and while I was hoping I may see these guys later on in the cycle leg on one of the climbs, it was certainly wishful thinking. Rapp was the one doing all the damage, as anyone who tried to stay with him seemed to suffer towards the end of the cycle leg. Contributing to this was a tough headwind in the final stages of the cycle, further draining legs that were already significantly fatigued as a result of a torrid early pace.

The good news for me was that after being passed by the three athletes in the initial stages of the cycle leg, no other athlete caught and passed me for the rest of the cycle leg.

I never really found my legs during the cycle and rode conservatively as a result, especially on the long climb of Richter pass, the seven rollers at the bottom of Richter pass and the moderately long Yellow Lake climb.

Despite this, I did manage to catch two athletes at about the 110 kilometre mark of the cycle leg, the first being Guembel and the second being Gav - who was clearly paying for his early exuberance.

The summit of Yellow Lake is approximately 30 kilometres from the end of the cycle leg and while the majority of it is flat or downhill, there was a headwind blowing that made it relatively difficult. I got into town in much better shape compared to previous years, and was hoping, as always, that I had legs for the run.

In the final stages of the cycle I noticed hitting a bump in the road very hard but thought nothing of it at the time. I was looking at some of the images Will's father sent through a couple of days after the race and they clearly showed my tyre was flat in the last kilometre of the cycle leg. This would explain my flat back tyre when I picked up my bike from transition after the race. I didn't notice any detrimental effects at all during the final stages of the cycle, but it is an interesting piece of trivia to report.

I was quite sure I was lying in ninth position at the end of the cycle after counting athletes by at the only turnaround point 120 kilometres into the cycle leg. I thought, as usual, a fair percentage of those in front of me would struggle to a degree, if not right from the start of the run leg, certainly during the latter stages. As a result, patience was definitely in order.

I was relieved to have legs when I started the run and after warming up a bit in the first 10 minutes, I started to move along at a very good pace.

I moved into 8th position straight out of transition, and then into 7th position after passing Hellriegel at the 9km mark.

Not long after this I noticed what seemed to be my sartorius muscle starting to flutter with cramp while running up one of the small hills at the 10km mark of the run. I had to slow down and walk for a small period as it really grabbed towards the top of the climb. I have had a bit of trouble with cramping in the past, and to say I was concerned is an understatement. I was fortunate enough to get through the rest of the run leg without further incident, but I believe that this was a sign that my nutrition on the day, and in my previous Ironman event in Japan, was far from optimal. Further evidence of this was how I felt physically at the end of both the Canada and the Japan events. Despite these concerns I was able to maintain a very good pace, and, on my way to the turnaround point on the single out and back run course, I passed two more competitors, Lavelle and Van Akkeren, to move into 5th position.

At the 16km mark of the run leg there is about 5km of taxing undulations prior to reaching the turnaround point. I was very conservative on these climbs as I was starting to feel some fatigue for the first time on the run leg – a bit early on for my liking – and, after the training I had got done while in Australia in the lead up to the event, unlikely to be the result of an endurance deficiency. Despite this, I did get out to the turnaround with one of the fastest splits of the day – 1.26 and change.

I looked at each of the competitors in front of me as they ran passed in the opposite direction. It is difficult to tell how each athlete is feeling, but sometimes it is obvious.

Rapp was well in the lead and looked very comfortable – he had a buffer of approximately 14 minutes at this stage with 18km to run – no chance of catching him.

Luke was next and looked ok. While I wasn't exactly sure of his buffer, it was significant and I didn't hold out any hope of catching him before the finish.

I believe Boecherer was next and he looked ok also, like Luke, I wasn't holding out any hope of catching him.

The last in line was Aigroz and he looked the better of those lying 2nd through to 4th, but he was only about 4 minutes in front of me, and, as I was still moving relatively well, that gave me some hope of reeling him in before the finish.

I was thinking that a 4th place finish was possible at that point which would be enough of a payday to cover the costs of the trip, plus a small amount more. More importantly, it would provide me a small amount of justification for continuing to compete.

The run back to the finish was into a stiff headwind for a significant portion of the journey. My batteries were starting to run low and the wind just made it worse.

Fortunately, two of the athletes in front of me were finding the going tough also. Boecherer and Luke both hit the wall not long after the turnaround and before long I found myself in 4th place, but, at the time, I was unaware of it.

Boecherer must have stopped on the side of the road, or was taking a restroom break as I ran by him. The only reason I knew I had inherited fourth was because at about the 28 kilometre mark I noticed the runner immediately in front was chaperoned by the third place indicating MTB rider. I was very surprised to see that it was Luke that I was just about to pass for third place. I eased by about 2 kilometres later and expressed surprise that I had caught him. The poor bugger just said that he was feeling "really fatigue" - in as many words.

I am not sure what happened to Luke, I would suggest either something with his nutrition or pacing strategy on the bike, as I really had no right to pass him on this day.

I was running in third place and with 12 kilometres to run I was by no means 100 percent confident of staying there before reaching the finish. I felt awful and my pace had slowed significantly. It was just a case of putting one foot in front of the other and hoping that there would be no challenge coming from behind.

After the torture of the last 12 kilometres I was very satisfied to run down the finish chute as the third place finisher. While I was an eternity behind the first place finisher, it was a day that rewarded hard heads and patience and I was proud of myself.

It was even more pleasing to know that my wife Raija would be over the moon with the result, together with my family and friends/athletes. It is great to be able to give them something after all their loyal support.

About 90 seconds after I finished, while they were trying to interview me, (which was a waste of time as I couldn't talk) I had to sit down and then hurl. I felt terrible and was taken to the medical tent for some treatment - I stayed for about two hours before feeling good enough to leave. There is something not quite right about that and it is something that I need to address.

Next for me is the World Champs on October 10th.

The plan for the next 6 weeks is to fly home for 10 days of recovery, followed by a three week block of training prior to flying to Hawaii and tapering down for 10 days.

Hawaii is "the" hard heads and patience race – we will see how it goes.