

Hi Guys,

Long race report for a long race!

Well I wanted to push my limits a bit, and do something that would be a challenge for me just to finish, and Northburn didn't disappoint there.

The course was super tough. Glad I did so much training for Goat Pass - it meant I didn't really struggle with the technical or rocky nature of the course at all. Just the hills. Northburn totally made me re-evaluate what a 'hilly' course is (the Coast to Coast run is flat by comparison). By the end I honestly didn't care about hills, you could have kept putting 500m climbs in front of me and would have just slowly started climbing them (I had given up on giving up by then...)

I decided I'd let a good 15 or so people get in front of me near the start so I didn't get too psyched out when they inevitably passed me, and I think at the start of the second loop I probably had about 10 or so 100-milers behind me. By the end of that loop I had 8 behind me, and by the end of the race nobody was behind me - but I'd only been passed once (all the rest were DNF's).

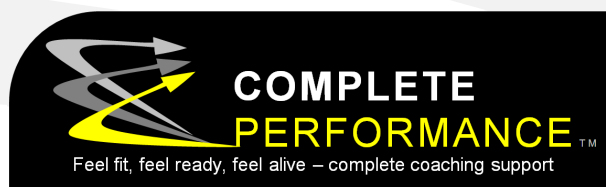
I made some pretty epic rookie mistakes. Leppin/Horleys worked fine for me (as per my training and Coast)... for 16 or so hours. Then failed spectacularly. I just groveled my way to the aid stations so I could try different foods to see if anything would stay down. So I've learnt that lesson - gels etc may be great for shorter events, but they just do not work indefinitely. Sooner or later (and for me it's later) the body needs 'real food'.

I stopped, took off my shoes and socks, cleaned my feet, re-taped and put new socks on between each of the 3 loops. In hindsight that probably saved me a lot of pain, was definitely the right move! (despite the time lost)

The course did have some reasonably technical sections though - a group of 3 of us made it to the 'water race' section at night. They had billed this as being bad in the briefings, and had 'extreme caution' signs up. Apparently it "shouldn't be fatal", their words... We literally took about 40 minutes through the gnarliest 1k section there! It might not have been so scary in daylight, dunno - but there didn't look to be much mountain to balance on.

I was in that group of 3 for a long time - maybe 6 hours or so. End of the 2nd lap the girl was feeling really good, so she powered off while I slowly walked in with an Aussie fellow who was losing the battle with the sleep monster - didn't really feel like leaving him alone on the mountain was safe, he was pretty smashed. He pulled when we got back to base and I continued onto the 3rd lap (with now only 2 people behind me who later pulled).

The weather at the end was tough. The front that came through Sunday evening hit really fast - I didn't even have time to stop and get my pack off before all my thermals etc were saturated. And there was a hell of a lot of wind in parts (I was



leaning sideways into it at one point, was a bit nuts). So wet gear in buckets of rain with masses of wind - so glad I'm reasonably tolerant of cold. Luckily I was only in it for about 2 or 3 hours before a 4wd found me and gave me a moleskin-style jacket and some hot soup (I would have made it to the next set of marshals without, but pretty sure I would have been hypo by then). So made it up to the next marshal point where they tailed me for the last 20k just-in-case. By that stage we were up higher and the rain was a horizontal snow storm.

The organizers were a bit lucky the front hit when only 7 of us were left on the course (and 3 up around the top), they were discussing rescue plans with a bit of concern if it happens again in a future year with more competitors on course (a lot of the course is 1+ hours away even by 4wd, and parts are completely inaccessible except by foot).

The marshals and organizers were amazingly on the ball. I'm used to shorter races where you just have to be self-sufficient, but I seriously wouldn't have been able to finish the race without their advice and support (esp: nutrition). All the medics were A++.

Got to know a few people reasonably well - took me a few hours before I realized that Ultras are a bit different and you can just chat to people (and most of the time it doesn't really even slow you down much). Different to the normal 'I'm trying to race here' stares.

They were tracking everyone's splits for the race (at many points), so it was always interesting to get back to base and see how fast the front of the field were moving. Gutted Blair McWhirter couldn't complete - I believe he was in 3rd for most of the race before pulling (I think medical).

I actually had my biggest bad patch mentally near the end of the first lap, by which stage I had fully realized how brutal the race was going to be. I found the overnight not too bad, but didn't get the pick-up I'd heard the sunrise can give you. I found continuing to give myself small progress goals to be really powerful by the end - although for a while it looked like I was going to go into a second night, which would have been pretty tough. These also became harder in the heavy rain/snow, where you didn't have visibility to the next landmark/hilltop/etc. Luckily the last 10k actually had a lot of downhill, which I was able to get some pace back up on.

So in the end I jogged in in the dark on Sunday night around 8pm, having been 'running' for about 38 hours 34 minutes. First 50k loop 7:49, transition 23 mins, second 60k loop 16:20 (overnight), transition 39 mins, final 50k loop 13:20 (through the storm).

Overall I'm still not sure if I'd say I had 'fun', or 'enjoyed it', but I'm relieved I started and finished it! If I'm stupid enough to psych myself up to try it again I'll actually compete (well kinda - as much I could).

Cheers,  
Sam

