

Zarnia Morrison – World long distance Tri champs Perth 2009

High Winds, Jellyfish and Heat at LDWC in Perth.

How did I qualify for this race? Sharon Brophy decided it was a good idea for me to fill in the selection form when we competed at the Tauranga Half Ironman in January. Sharon was there to qualify, I was there as part of my build up to Ironman NZ in March. So I filled in the form never expecting to qualify and thought nothing of it until early Feb when Iain emailed me to say I had been named on the team! Well I was very excited, not every day you get the chance to represent your country in a sport. So after checking out that the swim was not going to take place in the ocean, I decided to enter. Little did I know that the swim was still going to be so tough!



After a good build up and race at Ironman NZ 2009 with Richard Greer as my coach I decided that I would continue with him as a coach for this World Championship race.

Training over the winter was tough at times but I joined the tri club run club in a bid to improve my running and Richard developed a tough weights program in the gym to help improve my strength on the bike. The run training had a bit of a setback when I developed a hamstring injury, but with lots of physio and massage from John Ellis it came right.

My husband Iain also qualified for the World Champs however 2 ½ months out he developed an achillies injury and was forced to withdraw from the race the week before (he was not happy!). So he became my chief support crew!

We arrived in Perth one week before the race so I had time to acclimatise to the heat, the day we arrived it had been 37 degrees! Oh boy I was hoping it was not going to be that hot on race day. We spent the first few days having a look around Perth along with some light training and the weather was a lot cooler. The rest of the NZ team arrived on Monday night and most of us stayed in the same hotel that was a short 5min walk to the transition area of the course, Langley Park.

On Sunday I had my first look at the swim course and no, I was not getting in there until race day! The water was BROWN! So off to the pool it was. And we had been advised not to train in the water due to the cleanliness! Some of the other NZ girls were in there training but I was not prepared to risk getting a stomach bug so close to the race. Turns out nobody reported any stomach issues. There was also the issue of the LARGE jellyfish! Hmmmmmmmmmmmmm, and at our first team meeting one girl had been stung on the face! Ok so I can deal with these on race day I told myself, I had to do it in Tauranga so I can do it here.

I was a little disappointed in the build up to the race, there did not seem to be any atmosphere (this was my first world champs race and maybe my expectations were a little high?) There was a pasta and welcome party at Langley Park in the marquee on the Friday night and after a few looooooong speeches and an aboriginal welcome, which was fantastic, we were finally allowed to eat! However we had to stand in the queue for ages and the NZ team ended up eating the desserts first!

Race day I was pretty anxious about the swim and those jellyfish! It was also blowing a gale, now I know why Perth was such a good spot for the America's Cup. Sharon and I headed down to transition about 6.30am our wave started at 8:17am, pumped up the tyres, walked through the transition, got numbered and had one last toilet stop before putting on the wetsuit and heading down for the warm up swim. They had roped off a small

section for us to do this, so in I went , my first open water swim since March! Well the water was so brown that you could not see a thing! This would be a good thing later once the race started. Once we had completed our warm up swim we had to get out and then go into a holding pen until our wave was called to enter the water, then swim out to the start line for a deep water start.

I had only just got to start line, looked up and they said GO! Well this is it, off we go. Swimming is by far my worst discipline so I knew going into this race that it was going to be tough and I would have some catching up to do once on the bike and run. Right from the start the swim was TOUGH we had to swim 1.8km of the 3km into a headwind some reports said this was 40km/h! I had also decided to swim out to the right to avoid the waves of men that were coming up behind us so I ended up going too far out and I am sure i ended up swimming 4km. About 10mins into the swim we hit the jellyfish and there were hundreds of them – I stuck my hand right into the middle of one, arrrrrrgggggggggh. By the turnaround I was ready to get out! But it was still a long way to go. I had a short reprieve from the wind and thought I was swimming better but that did not last with the wind picking up again. I finally made it out of the swim and good job I hadn't set my watch at the start or I would have been tempted to withdraw from the rest of the race if I had seen my swim time.



Out on to the bike we had a nice tailwind to start off with which gave me a chance to refuel after that mission in the water, however after the first turn it was a headwind and then once up on the freeway we had crosswinds. The bike course was four laps of 20km and it was not long before all the other Kiwis who were flying past me were yelling go Kiwi! This helped with the motivation levels. I spent the first lap of the bike recovering and refuelling and also taking note of the course as this was the first time we had been on it! I kept to the race plan and by the end of the bike I felt like my legs were finally working and I hit my target time for the bike, bang on despite the windy conditions.

A quick transition and I was out on to the run, by this time it was really heating up (they said 32 degrees but felt hotter) and I could feel my arms burning despite putting on spf 45. My running legs arrived pretty much straight away and I was feeling pretty good. I walked through all the aid stations making sure the water went in and surprised Iain when I appeared at the end of the first 5km earlier than he had expected. The second lap did not go so well – at the race briefing they had said there would be toilets at every aid station, well there weren't, I still have no idea where they were. After asking numerous volunteers I finally left the run course and pushed a member of the public out of the way to use the public toilets in the park. Feeling better after my toilet stop the last two laps of the run went well, however it was HOT but I was coping ok. There were a lot of people walking and some feeding the plants.

Coming down the last few hundred metres of the run there was Sharon, the girl that got me into this race (she had finished in 11th place in our age group!) doing a little dance in the street and cheering me on, into the finish chute and there was Iain, I stopped to give him a kiss to say thanks for putting up with my grumpiness when training for this race during winter, and for cheering me on throughout the day. My run time was about 4-5mins off target, TOLIET STOP contributed to this.

Crossing the finish line, I was pleased that I had not withdrawn after the swim. I was just pleased I had finished and finished well with a good run. It was a tough race.

Thanks to Iain for your encouragement, Richard for your coaching support and Sharon for putting the idea in my head to do this race.