



Sri Chinmoy Triple Triathlon Race Report

*Canberra – 15 November 2009
Andrew Renwick – Solo*

2009 means two years have passed since I last took part in this event, I'm surprised at how much I have forgotten but more than surprised about how much I remember. In '07 I was surrounded and supported by a wonderful crew who got me to the start, through each leg and allowed me to get to the end. This year was no different.

My heartfelt thankyou goes to: Julie whose dedication during the rocky lead up (not to mention the event itself) really made all the difference. To mum, dad and my brother Stephen who gave it their all on the day, working tirelessly to ensure that my every need was met. To Graz who seemed to do everything short of carrying me to get me to the end. To Nigel and Kristy for making the journey to Canberra, braving the heat and getting their hands dirty. To Luke and Tsalina who stayed in Canberra for the 5:30am start even though they had 2 weddings that day in Sydney. To Pete for his excitement, energy and interest, races are always more fun when you experience them with someone else. Lastly, to my fellow competitors and the Sri Chinmoy team for making the event possible.

The lead up

2009 began with lofty ideals: after two years of complex, labour intensive racing I was looking forward to simplifying life, focussing on competing in a couple of known events and completing them well. The first was to be the 48hr GeoQuest Adventure Race held in June, we had a great team, I was race fit and strong, everything was looking good. A slight setback in May (4 week recovery from a tonsillectomy) did little to dampen the spirits but breaking my collarbone 22 minutes into the event certainly did...

So with one unsuccessful event under my belt the prospect of a three month recovery did not bode well for my attack on the Triple Tri in November. Should I even bother trying? Could I possibly get through with only two months training? Plagued by uncertainty I proceeded to undertake a shaky two month preparation*.

Questioning both my motives and my ability I persisted. In the final weeks what got me through was the belief that I had overcome too many hurdles already to give up now. As the relentless march of time drew the event weekend to the fore, much sooner than expected it was time.

* During these two months I succumbed to 3 bouts of a cold, 2 rounds of gastro, plagued by shocking guts for weeks and was the lucky recipient of 3 stitches in my stomach... hardly satisfactory.

The day before

Julie and I shared the lovely drive to Canberra on Saturday morning. Campbelltown, Goulbourn, Lake George, road kill... who needs a scenic route.

The plan was for a relaxing day before registration and dinner with a few crew. All was going to plan up until 4pm when I managed to tear the sidewall of my tyre, not ideal. Action stations! A couple of emergency phone calls to locate an open bike store, a bike store owner who learned how to fit tubeless tyres (big thanks go to Rob Marshman for his instruction and assistance), a rushed registration and a fairly (but not overly) frazzled Andrew. Thankfully it all got sorted out and in reality was for the best, my lightweight non-UST race tyres never would have made it through the day.

Pre-race dinner @ El' Dorado's was a blast. We had a massive crew comprised of my supporters (all listed above), Pete's Mum & Dad, Larissa, Sean & Kim plus Simon and Eden. A few took on the ½ kilo of cow (not me) and got through it!

Up time was 4:15am, we crawled into bed about 10ish after forgetting that we needed a car shuffle before the morning. Sleep was disappointing and before right before drifting off both my calves grabbed resulting in gentle cramps. Certainly not ideal, and something that would come back to haunt me the following day.



Leg 1 - 1.5km Swim

Time: 0:28:04 **Leg place:** 9

Things to do next time: Lose the chicken arms, pump some iron.

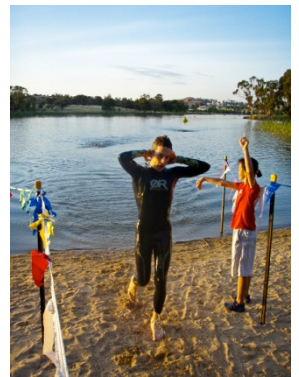
We fronted up to lake Ginninderra for the start and for the 3rd year in a row the council failed to open the toilets (perhaps we need to get worse at burying the evidence?) No one starts a day's racing without a visit so relief was sought under limited vegetation.



Four weeks earlier the lakes measured a cool 13 degrees, this had risen to a balmy 21 for our event (who needs solar heating when you can have Canberra runoff?)

Unlike '07 I was calm and ready for what I faced, this was due not only to experience but also because I was sharing the start line with Pete. Challenges are always easier when faced with friends. With only 10 minutes to kick off I started to get the feeling that I was missing something... goggles and cap! Crap, they are in the car at the end of the swim... Thankfully Graz came to the rescue and we were ready to go.

After a brief operational delay, a last 'good luck' with Pete, we were off. I knew that my swimming had suffered over my lead up but it was still disappointing to see the pack swim away from me within the first hundred. I kept my spirits up by focussing on not swallowing any water and churned away, plenty of hours to go!



Leg 2 - 35km Mountain Bike

Time: 2:00:23 **Leg place:** 6

Things to do next time: Don't refuse food, you will regret it later.

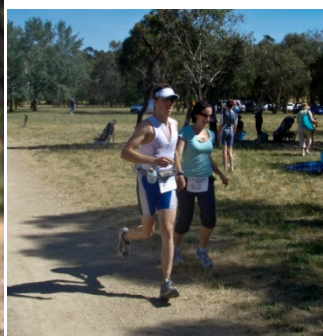


Julie, Stephen and Graz provided a flawless transition and I was ready to go in no time. Pete had his race-face on and after a few brief words he was off. It was great to be able to say hi as this proved to be the last time I would see him today.

Of course, push bike hill lived up to its name. Loose and steep as ever it is hardly much easier to walk! I met my crew at the top of Black Mountain and sped down the other side.



I always enjoy this leg and everything flowed smoothly, before I knew it I was spinning into transition. Word was that Pete was looking strong and had exited about 10 minutes earlier. I had a faster ride than '07 and was feeling great. Bring on the run!



Leg 3 – 20km Run

Time: 1:51:44 **Leg place:** 5

Things to do next time: Do more run training! Who would have thought that 3 training runs over 7kms was not sufficient preparation?

With two nasty mountains to climb (plus a smaller one) this leg is always a challenge. From transition you go straight up Mt Majura, there is not even a run up to work into it but I was feeling good. Slightly altering my running approach a few weeks earlier paid dividends and this leg could almost have been described as *easy, light & smooth*. Even so the legs still take a beating on this one as there is just as much downhill as there is up.

I ran into transition another 10 minutes faster than last time ready for a cool dip in Lake Burley. Given my lack of preparation I was feeling strong and confident, 20 minutes ahead of '07 and only 15 minutes down on the leaders. To hear that the leader was Pete was inspiring news, what a legend.



Leg 4 – 3.5km Swim

Time: 1:13:11 **Leg place:** 12

Things to do next time: Sort out my stomach and run more to avoid leg cramping.

Where last time this swim was a welcome relief, this year it was punishment. The calf cramps started immediately and did not let up, a gu at the aid station made little difference and it felt as though I was out there for hours. Swimming with toes flexed forward is certainly not the most efficient way to swim and even knowing what was to come next I was still glad to see the back of this leg.

Leg 5 – 42km Mountain Bike

Time: 2:52:52 **Leg place:** 10

Things to do next time: Eat more!

In 2007 I cooked myself on this leg, this year I was determined not to let it happen again. Fluids, fluids, fluids was my mantra, I kept sipping away and it paid dividends. Technically this leg is the least demanding of the three but with the mercury reaching 34 degrees (and that's in the centre of Canberra) the reality is that this leg punches above its weight.

The descent off Mt Stromlo was soured by the need to follow a series of arrows that had been rudely hidden behind markers from an event held the day before. That coupled with the ascent through the oven on the back side really made this leg quite arduous, it was fantastic to see my crew at both Coppins Crossing and Cotter Road waiting with an icy sponge bath.

I certainly fared better this year, knocking almost 25 minutes off my time, but my legs were in bad shape. Forgetting to keep my heels down meant cramps and getting out of the saddle for climbs was a gamble where winning meant getting to the top without injury. With the toughest run still to come and then another triathlon there was still a long way to go.

Leg 6 – 12km Run

Time: 1:28:27 **Leg place:** 3

Things to do next time: Do more run training to toughen the hell up.

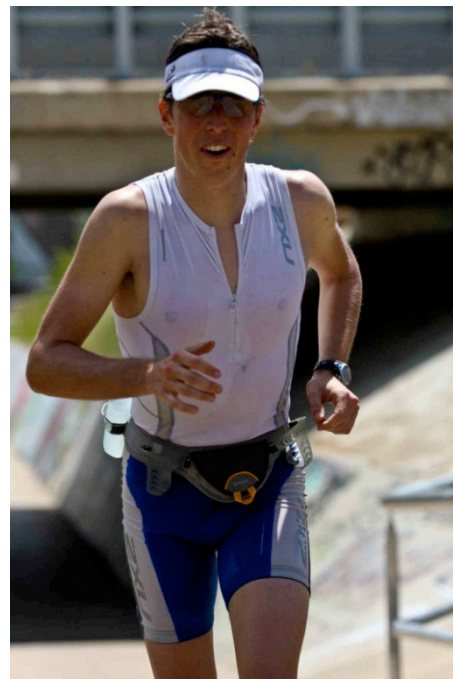
Mt Taylor. I'm not sure how to personify this mountain: either a vindictive female who likes to see you suffer or an alpha male who's out to prove who's boss. Whichever case I was squarely beaten, spending the majority of the ascent walking without even the will to run.

It was hot and dry, my legs were cooked. Running down the back side and through the suburbs on cramping legs cannot be called pleasant and about ½ way through my inner demons cackled to life: "why are you out here", "there is still one tri to go, you are never going to make it" and the worst "how comfortable does that patch of rocky dirt look for a nap". I was done.

The only advantage of this unhelpful chatter is that it kept my mind from focussing on my legs, so after another few k's I made myself this promise – The only way I'm getting off this course before the finish line is:

1. If I miss a cut-off and therefore I'm not allowed to continue
2. If I fall over and can't get up

From there on every doubt was measured against these two statements, leaving me little choice but to continue. I struggled into transition, two triathlons down and one to go, trying to psyche myself into the swim.



Leg 7 – 1.2km Swim

Time: 0:33:24 **Leg place:** 10

Things to do next time: Remember that just because you think you're going to drown does not actually mean you are going to drown.

My report from '07 described this leg as *watery bliss*... this time around it was more like *watery hell*. The cramps started immediately, the familiar calves, hamstrings, quads, back and big toe joints (who would have thought).

There was no relief and 1.2km has never seemed so far. At one point I was convinced that I could not swim any further, battling to stay afloat I searched in vain for a support boat to pull me out. Thankfully (though not at the time) there was no one around so I had to suck it up and keep on moving.

The end of this leg involves climbing a ladder up onto a wharf. I'll leave it unsaid how my legs responded to that challenge.

Leg 8 – 24km Mountain Bike

Time: 2:03:20 **Leg place:** 12

Things to do next time: Eat more, make sure that I finish the food that I planned for each leg.

This transition was not pretty, my lead on my previous attempt at this race was being slowly but surely whittled away. My crew got me ready to leave while the aliens that had replaced my calf muscles bulged and pulsated of their own accord.

The climb up Mt Stanley is the steepest climb of the entire course. I could not even attempt the fire trail let alone the rocky single track that it became. Somewhere along this leg I fell into a deep dark mental hole, it was not good. My energy was gone, I was having trouble seeing and if I was not on my bike I probably would have fallen over. It took me a long while to realise that I had stopped eating some time ago and a bit longer to realise what I needed to do to change that. Drinking Perpetuem pulled me out, restored some strength and was the crutch I needed to continue.

Cheering down the final descent I opted to ride through the tunnel that burrows under the road. Given that I was struggling to keep the bike on line in the daylight my attempts in the dark were laughable at best. Thankfully no one could see me.



Leg 9 – 13km Run

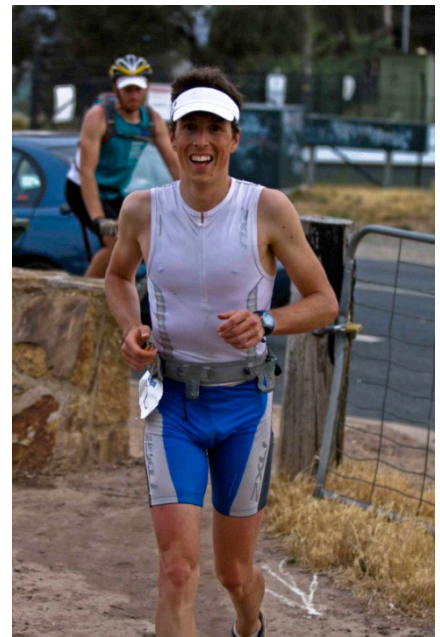
Time: 1:46:31 **Leg place:** 12

Things to do next time: Pretend I'm having fun, see the smile in this photo? It's real...

At this transition I got the news that Pete had finished 3rd in around 12 hours, I was stoked. As always Pete sets the bar, both his level of performance and his attitude providing inspiration. Rock on.

For me the end was finally in sight (all be it at the end of a run almost the length of the City 2 Surf). Given the lateness in the day, plus the state of my legs, Graz offered to join me on his bike. This can't have been very rewarding from a rider's point of view, our average speed would have hovered around 7 km/h, I was babbling rubbish for the majority and walking anything that even hinted uphill. From my point of view it was a god-send for which I am eternally grateful. Graz kept me moving, my mind on the prize, would not let me stop for a nap and refused even the shortest 'dink' on his bike.

It took a long time but we got there in the end. My legs were well and truly spent but I had avoided the chronic dehydration from '07 and so was in better shape all round. Overall 11th place in 14 hours and 15 minutes, only 3 minutes longer than 2007!



The end of a Journey

It's safe to say that this race (nor this year) panned out as I had hoped. Setbacks to training were numerous and varied, my confidence took a battering and if I asked myself once how I could possibly get through this race I must have asked myself a thousand times. Stubbornness, perseverance, determination, I drew strength from those around me and they gave it willingly. What have I learned from this experience?

Just because you cannot see you are not entitled to doubt.

– Sri Chinmoy

