

## The Blenheim Palace Triathlon (May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005)

This is my second season of competing in triathlons and to be honest this was one of best sporting experience ever. When in December I thought about doing something that meant venturing outside Essex, so I choice to enter this particular triathlon as it promised to be the first sporting event on the palace grounds, but most of all the organiser promised the triathlon of a lifetime.

Right from the beginning the organisation was spot on, I entered online and had confirmation e-mail back within hours. If that was not good service I had an e-mail ever second week explaining the different things that are needed to enter triathlons. There were weekly training sessions, novice to expert advice on all three disciplines, wetsuit hire and too many other things to mention.

Well with two weeks to go my pack arrived through the post, with race numbers and lots of other useful information, which included the race map and a map for spectators.

The big weekend arrived before you knew it, and I was travelling with my family (fan club) to Oxfordshire for an adventure of lifetime, my boys were more excited than me, but to be honest my wife was not too hot on the idea of camping on a blow up bed. The journey down to Oxfordshire was quite pleasant the traffic was minimal and the weather was warm enough to have the air conditioning on in the car, until passed the sign to Oxford. From there onwards the rain started and only stopped all weekend for the morning of the Triathlon.

For anyone that has been camping and has ever had to put up a tent in the pouring rain will know what I was going through and to make things worst my wife and kid were moaning about the rain I tried to make things better my saying "come on its an adventure". Once the tent was up I started unpacking all the clothes out of the trailer to find that the boys in their wisdom had decided to get theirs bikes out pulling over different tubs in the process. One of the tub contained food and a certain bottle of cooking oil, which ended upside down on my Triathlon tub which contained an oil looking wetsuit, a oily bike helmet and very slippery trainer, but to make things ever worst the main bulk of the cooking oil spilt on wife's clothes (and I cannot repeat the words that came from such normal polite woman) the boys disappeared rather sharpish.

On the morning of the triathlon I awoke at 6.30am and started getting my equipment ready, as I had to get to the palace and registered before 8am in the morning despite my start time of 9.45am. When I arrive at the palace the place was buzzing with excitement, you could feel it in the air. As this was their first event at the palace the organisers had gone to great lengths to make it the 100% and maybe a little more. I parked my car and walked over to the registration area and find my designated place for picking up my racing chip and final details.

Once I had registered I walked my bike to the transitional area and find my rack number 628 and stood there wondering how I was ever going to find my bike through the mountain of bikes already racked and I was an hour early. I set out my stuff and felt my bike behind and headed down to the lake to seat and wait for my time. By 9.15am there must have been three hundred people seating behind me all dressed in black wetsuits and you could see the atmosphere glowing all around. The call came over the speaker system that competitors in section D could make there way down to the lake. The race organisers explained at the briefings that all competitors needed to be in the water with 5 minutes to go. They also said that the water was very cold and that to take it easy when getting out as your legs might still be numb, I laughed with everyone else until it was my turn to jump in, my god it was cold and yes everything went numb for a minute or so. After what seemed a very long 5 minutes the horn was blown and my race had begun. I had never swam in such a mad rush of people I thought we were being chased by a mad shark or something, four or five people must have straight over the top of me before I had swam the first 5 meters. 18 minutes later I had finished the 800 meters upriver swim and ran the 400 meters uphill to try and find my bike.

By the time I had reached my area my brain had gone, so many things to remember .i.e. don't take your bike out of the rack before putting on your helmet, don't forget your trainers, don't forget to drink and somewhere you should have taken off your wetsuit. I can't remember what order I did all that but I was away for a 14-mile bike ride, which was three laps of the palace grounds. I tried to get up ahead of steam, and thought I was doing ok, until other bikes flew past doing crazy speeds on the downhill sessions. After 14 miles on the bike in 40 minutes I was feeling believe it or not quite good, until my feet hit the ground and then the jelly syndrome set in. I chucked my bike on the rack, though my helmet in the tub and started the 5k run, which was a two-laps of the lake area. The first lap went fine once my left leg had caught up with my right leg, by this time some of the elite athletes were flying past and left me in their dust. The second lap was very heavy on my legs but I sprinted the final 30 meters and finished the run in 28 minutes.

For anyone that has not experienced the trill of a triathlon, Blenheim Palace 2006 is where you should begin.

Brian Telford