

(from irishtriathlon.com)

Ironman Austria – Report by Alan Ryan

Alan Ryan put together his thoughts after yet another sub-9:30 Ironman at Austria.

“Racing Ironman Hawaii takes it out of you, it’s not just the physical effort but emotionally you are also shattered. Don’t get me wrong, I have loved every minute of my Kona trips. In our sport, there is probably no greater privilege for a little 43 year old baldy fella than to be allowed to enter out into the tropical waters of Kailua Harbour with many of the legends of this sport and race. But every time - when it was over, I was really shattered.



Austria 2010 Finish line.

Outside of triathlon the lead up to Kona last year had also been a busy time for me. We moved house the day before flying out and with a three month old baby around the place, we were still only getting used to the logistics of parenthood. On returning home the thoughts of doing another Ironman were put very much to the back of my mind. I needed a little time away from swimming, biking and running. Yet last Sunday morning I somehow found myself on the start line of Karnten Ironman Austria. The organisers had released a few extra slots in February and I just couldn’t help myself. I did my first Ironman in Austria in 2005. It’s a beautiful part of the world and the race organisation is one of the best.

This would be my ninth Ironman and luckily I have managed to finish them all, and all in less than ten hours. I was keen to keep the sub ten hour thing going. Lurking at the back of my mind is the possibility of ten sub ten Ironman’s down the road. Ordinarily being a good fast course Austria should be kind to me. However I have never been as worried about a race as I was about Austria this year. I knew with the late start to my training, my fitness would be marginal going into it. Life also just seemed to keep getting in the way this time. Some distractions were wonderful. To watch my little fella grow and learn to walk was something special, other distractions weren’t so welcome. I did my best to integrate what training I could into Ryan family life but with the limited time available there were more short intense sessions than the long ones of previous Ironman build-ups. Some very very late night turbo sessions featured strongly.

Alan Ryan was Ireland’s fastest finisher in Kona 2009, despite a flat tyre on the cycle.



I had not sat on my time trial bike since dismounting in T2 in Hawaii until a short training spin the day before Tri-Athy this year – and it showed. Alarmed by how bad I felt in Athy I embarked in a last month of cram training (leaving cert. like) which even

included some swimming, something I had not done all winter. A late entry into the Skerries Sprint race and a good result the Sunday before my Ironman provided a well needed lift. I had been feeling particularly under the weather beforehand and whatever about cycling and swimming at least I felt my running legs were coming back.

I took a very timid line in the swim in Austria. For the first time I intentionally avoided most of the mayhem at the start and despite the lack of swim training I felt I didn't swim too badly. I decided I wouldn't look at the clock as I exited the lake, a bad time would only upset my concentration. I kept my head down as I ran past. "Ah feck it" I turned around, 1:09, eight minutes slower than my best, I wasn't impressed. But what did I expect!

The bike started OK; with a little cloud cover the morning had not been as hot as previous mornings. I was settling into a decent rhythm I felt; abusing a few cheaters as I passed always cheers me up. But all the time the skies were clearing and the temperature was rising. Very quickly I began to feel bad. My nutrition was coming back up. I tried not to let it disturb my rhythm but it's a little disconcerting puking ones ring up at 70kmph. Visually it's quite spectacular though and at least no one was sucking my wheel. I am normally OK in the heat; it may not have been the cause of the problem. Obviously there was the little matter of lack of fitness and also an old GI issue had flared in recent months that hadn't fully cleared up – either way, due to some combination of all of these factors I was feeling miserable. For the first time ever I was beginning to doubt whether I would finish. Towards the end of the first lap I dropped a chain on a hill. I got off the bike, put the chain back on and took a bit of time out to calm down and try and get some water back in. The thoughts of another lap of this on the bike did not appeal and then the small matter of the marathon.

But I wanted the finish line experience, I wanted my medal and if I had to walk all the way I would. I have never quit a race and I wasn't going to today. The second lap of the bike continued much the same way as the first. Thankfully a shower of rain near the end served to clean me up a bit before the run.

I took a bit of time out in transition to prepare mentally for the run. There were moments again when I thought of not starting it, but I would have always regretted that. I knew I needed to get some food to stay down very quickly on the marathon or I would run out of calories and be in real trouble. I tentatively left the tent sucking on a gel and began to jog. That didn't feel too bad, so I began to run. Norbert Langbrandtner, an Austrian professional athlete who came second here in 2005 when I did my first race was just ahead. He was retiring after today. Obviously not at his best but still a fine athlete. If I could tuck in behind him for a while I would be doing OK. Very quickly my whole demeanour changed. I began to feel good. It was heating up again but food and drink were staying down. Norbert was running too slow so I left him behind. I was enjoying the run, my turnover was good and I was relaxed. I got

into a comfortable rhythm and made it to the finish line and got my medal. The excitement of finishing never diminishes; it is the same for everybody no matter what time they achieve. The finishing chute pulls you in from a few kilometres out and all the pain disappears, for a while anyway. Nine Ironman races completed and much to my amazement nine sub 10 hour times.

Despite all the pain and shenanigans I actually managed my second fastest time so far. It just goes to show that a long distance triathlon really is a three act play with many sub plots and twists before the story is resolved. There will be low points but they can be overcome. You can be down and out at the end of act two and still come back and win the girl.

Obviously travelling with a small boisterous child there was little opportunity to socialise and meet up with some of the other Irish competitors in Austria this year. Looking at the results thought there were some great Irish performances – most notably Joyce Wolfe who got so close to the Irish record and a very high overall position. Up the road in Frankfurt the Irish were flying the flag with distinction as well. It must be said that in recent years there have been some great Irish results all over the world with age group podium finishes in UK, Nice, Australia, Spain, Austria, and my own podium finish in Kona. In Desi McHenry we have a 70.3 World Champion. From such a small athlete base we really are punching well above our weight at this age group long distance stuff.

I am particularly proud of the fact that out of a team of five Irish age group athletes in Kona last year two of us finished ahead of all the GB age group team of nearly 100. Bar one injury the others were all very much towards the very top of the British team too. With more World Champions at the different distances than any other nation the UK are undoubtedly one of the strongest triathlon nations. Encouragingly there appears to be already quite a few Irish qualified for Kona this year. I wish them all well. I am going to pass this time. I made a decision on the bike that if I somehow did get the offer of a slot I would not accept it. I am nowhere near fit enough and I would not be able to put in the hours that such a brutal course demands. In the end I was chuffed to get the offer but have no regrets declining it. If I am ever lucky enough to go back to Kona again I will be fit and hopefully a much improved swimmer.”