

Fingal's Ironmen to face gruelling triathlon test



HUBERT MURPHY

A TEAM of 'ironmen' will depart from Fingal to compete in one of the most gruelling sports around - the Austrian Ironman Triathlon.

The event takes place on July 3 and consists of a 3.8km swim, followed by a 180km cycle and finished off with a marathon.

There are six Skerries men competing in the event as part of the 3dtri triathlon club. Former Skerries rugby star Shaun Gilbride, John Power (another ex rugby player), Alan and Fergus Ryan (sons of Hugh Ryan the artist. and author) Emma Quirke (Masseuse to the 1st Rugby Team) and Derek Fagan. Also Johnny McCabe, the ex Skerries scrum half from Dundalk, is signed up.

So what drives normal people to compete in such an event?

After retiring from rugby, where the highlight was playing in the Leinster Senior Cup final of 1998, Shaun helped out marshalling at the Skerries' triathlon organised by Fergus Ryan and Joe May. After that he was hooked.

'In June 2002 I started training for the Dublin City marathon, finished



Fergus Ryan 3Dtri, Alan Ryan Chaos, John Power 3Dtri, Brian Martin Ironman Wetsuits, Dan Bullock Swim for Tri, Shaun Gilbride 3Dtri

it and then over the winter started swimming lessons,' he explains.

'My first triathlon was Skerries 2003 National Sprint Championships and I finished this, actually making it into the top 50 though I think local knowledge did help here! I did about eight races that year finishing with a Half Ironman in Kenmare that

September. I'm very much a middle of the pack athlete.'

The thought of competing in the ironman events grew and he decided, due to family commitments, 2005 was the year to try it.

'I then told the rest of the lads my plan and though they weren't entirely keen initially they soon were

on board, if cursing me a little!' he admits.

'Typically, I'd train between 12-18 hours a week with anything between eight to 12 training sessions. Monday is a rest day but all other days are generally pretty full,' Shaun adds.

'Weekends typically involve a long

cycle (5/6 hours) followed by a short run and then a long run and swim on the other day. Also there would be one long run a week (2/3 hours) in mid-week.'

'I haven't had a social life for the last six months really. Typically by a Sunday night I am fit to do nothing and tend to be asleep by 9.30pm

most nights. However, it does allow you to eat a lot of food so there is an upside!'

The group have done some simulations of shorter distances already (e.g. 120k cycle and 30k run) and although tough, the 'test runs' are vital to build up stamina.

'By the end of my simulations I have been in a pretty bad state and generally need a few days to recover,' Shaun admits.

Ironman Austria in Klagenfurt will have 2,000 competitors (50 Irish this year) and takes place on July 3. The winner will take approx eight hours and the final cut-off is 17hrs. The Irish record is 9hr 26 mins set last year in Austria and to put this in perspective the guy who broke this did not even qualify for the World championships in Hawaii.

'I'd like to be somewhere in the middle, but mainly just finish and be happy with my performance. Ironman is for most people not a race against other people but a race against yourself.

'You don't sprint (except for the last 10 meters) you focus on keeping a steady pace throughout the whole race,' Shaun continues.

As part of the venture, Alan Ryan is also making a documentary on the whole journey based on Shaun, John, Fergus and himself. 'It's been an interesting few months to say the least!' concludes Shaun.