

The Brit Made Me Do It: An Ironman Adventure

David Hobbs, dhobbs@hobbsgiroday.com, Ironman participant 2006, 2007

The adventure started in a truck one day when John (the "Brit") said he'd completed the Ironman. The Brit didn't look or sound like someone who had completed the Ironman. He wasn't chiselled. He was sort of a "Jolly Fellow" in his 50's.

I thought, and my friend Bill thought, "Gosh, if he can do it maybe I could do it." The Brit said anybody can do it. After all, it was only a 3.8 kilometer swim, 183 kilometer bike ride on some nasty hills in excruciating heat and a 43 kilometer marathon. My doctor said I should avoid running at all costs (bad knee). The whole thought made my stomach queasy, yet Bill had a twinkle in his eye. The makings of an adventure.

Bill's not a procrastinator. And, once your good friend has signed up to take the plunge, the pressure is really on.

Could I do it? I had a 200 lbs body on a 50 year old, 5'8" frame with a bad knee. On the positive side I had swum competitively in university. Two years prior I had tried four Olympic triathlons and each time got a bit better. I had attended Masters swimming for six to seven years.

A good carpenter never blames his tools. In the endeavour of triathlons it is the mind and body trained to whatever level you can muster (with a bit of genetics and age hindering progress) that gets you through, right?

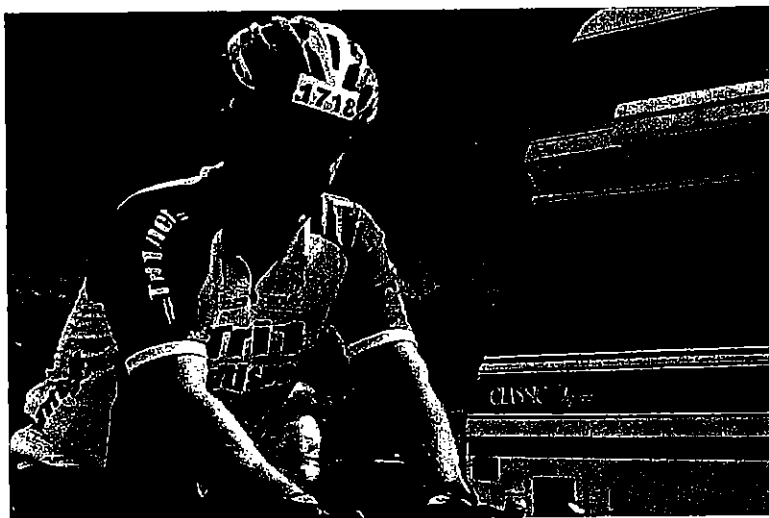
Bill interviewed coaches and chose Dean Stanton. Dean is an accomplished triathlete and coach. Dean's father Mark is approaching 70 and also trains with Dean. Dean's mother makes sure Mark doesn't kill himself and she organizes Dean's life. Dean "has been known" to run late.

The cast of characters were many: Marty, Natalie, Patty, Sheila, John, Walter, the guy

who trained with us in the beginning but was too good for us and left, Mark Shorter, Khosro (our swim coach), the swim team, the North Shore Tri Club members, the Brit, Jon Bula (my strength trainer), Hayley, and many others.

My 23 year old son Gavin told me flat out I couldn't complete the Ironman. He said I was nuts. Many people agreed with Gavin but had the courtesy not to tell me.

I started with Dean in the fall of 2005. I stayed with my Masters Swimming with Khosro three to four times per week. Dean



Mr. Hobbs, the marathoner: Lawyer-turned-Ironman David Hobbs enjoys the thrill and adventure of training and racing Ironman 2006. Photo: unknown.

would send an email training schedule once a week that went prominently on the fridge. So much swimming, cycling, running, stretching and strength training each week. I hired John at Groundwork Athletics as I kept tweaking my calf muscles trying to learn to run again. Twice a week at lunch time I would strengthen my whole body with wobble boards, bosun balls, free weights, stretch cords, dynamic stretching, abdominal work, foot work and skipping (I hate skipping).

During the winter months we went on long cycle rides in the cold and rain. Not much fun and frankly, sometimes dangerous. Saturdays went from three hours to four hours

to five hours (getting the idea) to nine hours of cycling.

My racing schedule began with the Oliver Half Iron in June. I completed it in 6:12. I was 20th in the swim out of 650 participants, my cycle went well and I ran two thirds of the run.

In July and early August the training got ugly, thanks to Dean's regime. Running up to thirty kilometers, swimming three to four kilometers at a time. Cycling up to 200 kilometers. We got lean: I lost 20 - 25 lbs by July. Bill lost 40 - 45 lbs. Tommy lost 40 - 50 lbs.

Fun fact: Bill is my grocery store during races. I know he'll be carrying anything I need, so, don't tell him, but I don't carry anything. I just get stuff from him if I need anything.

Race week: A year's preparation for something, thousands of hours of training and having nightmares about the day. Some days you visualize it like a piece of cake but you know that vision can't be accurate. Other days you are in quicksand dying on the course in a pool of blood and flat tires.

Many people offer words of wisdom. The best advice was from the Brit given on day one: "Have fun and enjoy the day".

I woke up at 4:00 a.m. on August 27th. Hayley, Bill and I rode into town from Kaleden to Bill's favourite song "Simply the Best". It was all good: 4:00 a.m., Bill, Hayley and Tina Turner.

I swim faster than most people so I lined up directly behind the markers on the beach with only a few hotshots in front of me. I don't want to get run over but I didn't want to swim through 2,500 people either. The cannon went, I swam a bumpy 3.8 kilometers in 59 minutes; 145th overall with only a couple of whacks along the way.

My transition was not great. I had packed dry fruit in my bike shirt pockets and it is like trying to put on a shirt full of rocks. A volunteer helped me push and pull stuff on. I was amongst all the hotshots with their tri suits under their wetsuits. They came and were gone in sixty seconds. I was five minutes trying to get dressed.

I rode up Main Street spinning in the small cog. Dean said take it easy. Let the people pass. Well, they were passing me like I had a flat tire. I persevered with the plan; or, at least I thought I was. The fastest time I had ever ridden from Penticton to Osoyoos was about two hours and fifteen minutes. I got there in two hours or maybe a bit less. I felt good but the speedometer said I was going too fast.

Up the infamous Richter Pass, eleven kilometers of hill with four discrete sections going from most difficult to something worse.

About half way up I hear "You're doing great David!" I look up and there is my law partner, Ian Giroday, who drove all the way from Vancouver to surprise me with some support. I zoomed down the other side of Richter. "Fridges" like me zoom downhill and consider it a freebee.

By the time I reached the "Out & Back" my legs were cramping. I was sick of fig newtons and dried fruit and I didn't feel like peeing which is a bad sign of possible dehydration. I couldn't stand on my pedals and my quads were starting to cramp. Apparently, karate experts call "kaiai" the focus of all mental and physical ability. I thought "kaiai", whatever that is.

In the middle of the "Out & Back" I was able to borrow some salt tablets from two other riders. I had put mine in my middle back shirt pocket and they had dissolved in the sweat running down my back. I got off my bike for five minutes, chatted with people and ate some of my bagel with honey in

my special needs bag. I felt better. "Keep moving." Kathy, Gavin, the Jones and the Plants were all sitting at the Bear Fruit Stand in Keremeos. I was lifted by their presence and cheering.

It's a gradual uphill to the last demon on the cycle course. Yellow Lake Hill. It's men-

tally tough as the last big climb, at the 140 kilometer mark.

It was lined with hundreds of people like the Tour de France. I couldn't stand on my pedals due to cramps so I just sat in low gear and spun up the hill. Once I had beaten Yellow Lake Hill I felt the worst was over and rode quickly into Penticton. Coming into town felt good. The streets were lined with thousands of cheering people. I

finished the cycle in six hours and thirty-five minutes. My fastest ride ever. It was now 2:45 p.m. I donned my new runners (felt good at the store, oops?) and headed out for a little 43 kilometer marathon run at 3:00 p.m.

I hate running because it hurts me. I am a floater. Floaters float because its easy compared to running. Running has many enemies -- bad knees, sore feet, stiff hips etc. I had worked at my running for a year but, it's going to take some more work (a lot more, and maybe another 20 lbs) to "convert" me.

I ran the first two to four kilometers in the crowd lined streets. What a thrill -- Mr. Hobbs the marathoner. The good news is no one sees you all the time, they just get snapshots as you go by, so no one knows how crappy a runner you really are, I also had the joy of knowing I would now be seeing one by one all my friends as they ran by me. Thanks a lot. There is no swim / bike only circuit. I'll have to invent this for

"floaters".

Stephen King taught me to walk fast. He said if you must walk (and most do) walk quickly. I am the type of person who walks slowly. Somehow on this unusual day I found the "fast walk for floaters". Fifteen minutes per mile. A fellow in the transition told me that you can walk the marathon in six and a half hours. Well, I am living proof that's true.

My son Gavin joined me at the five miles to go. It was getting dark. My two goals were too finish and to break fifteen hours. I was well on track for both.

Gavin made me so proud. He told me I looked good and was doing great. He calls me "Bruce" because he says I look like Bruce Willis. I prefer "Dad" but, there was a lot of love in those five miles, and I felt blessed to have a son that would walk with his old man for five miles in the dark on such an unusual day.

I saw the Penticton hotel lights coming down Main Street with two miles to go. I was lifted by the people and the excitement. Yet, I forgot I had to walk away from the finish line in a little out and back down Lakeshore Drive. I marched along at my fifteen minutes per mile pace.

I turned the final corner and was surprised that the race was over. I was dazed and giddy. The training, coaching and support had done its job. The volunteers and cheering supporters carried me through a difficult day making it a joy to experience. I hope this story helps ignite whatever spark you have to take on a new challenge. Don't let lack of focus, doubt or fear hold you back. You can do it!

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