

GRIFFO HITS THE ROAD

Join Leon Griffin as he heads to the Northern summer and some of triathlon's biggest races

Melbourne's Leon Griffin is one of many Australian triathletes who annually hit the road to compete in the Northern summer, racing in the US and Europe from training bases all over the show. Leon has settled into his base in Boulder, Colorado, and will be providing us with updates during the summer racing season overseas. Join him and keep track of our great Aussies overseas.



FIRST WIN OF 2008: Griffio breaks the tape at Ironman 70.3 Geelong

First, let me start off by telling you what this column won't be doing: I won't be trying to overwhelm you with buzzwords, heart rate zones, lactate levels, correct stroke technique or nutritional analysis—but there will be plenty of food covered; we are in the world's junk food capital, don't forget! I won't be calling on some whiz-bang physiologist's research that suggests you must follow a training plan that they have devised in order to get the most from yourself.

Instead I'll be providing unparalleled access to those "behind the scenes" moments that encompass everyday life for a professional triathlete, from the training to the action at the races, the trials and tribulations of traveling, reports and interviews with the big guns in the sport, and some lighter moments in between.

This will be my third year leaving Australian shores and competing in some of the world's biggest and best triathlon's on the circuit. It's my sixth summer in a row—but that's nothing on some, though, as Jono Hall, current VIS coach, reminded me just the other day he's enjoyed 35 back to back!

Some of the races I'll be attending are favourites I'm eager to return to, such as the event known to some as the "Woodstock of triathlon." That's Wildflower, where 30,000 people—participants and spectators—camp in rugged central

California. I'll also head to big-city races like New York City, Chicago, Dallas and the rich Life Time Fitness Triathlon in Minneapolis.

As Australians got their first taste of Ironman 70.3 racing this year in Geelong, the series in the US is kicking into top gear and going gangbusters with

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15 races on their domestic calendar at last count. This year I will make my way to some new additions to the 70.3 series, to races such as Boise and Kansas in the US and Muskoka in Canada, and some other long-time fixtures at Buffalo Springs in Texas and Timberman in New Hampshire.

All eyes are always on the biggest prize in triathlon leading into the Ironman World Championships in October. Last year I had the good fortune of completing some key workouts with Chris McCormack and Craig Alexander during their preparations in Boulder, Colorado, with the pair ultimately going on to take the top two steps on the dais at Ironman's biggest prize.

Boulder will again be my base away from home this Northern Hemisphere summer, and I hope to show you just what it takes to scale such heights as I punch out some more sessions with these super athletes at dizzying altitudes of between 1500-3000 meters!

I also hope to provide something for those aspiring to the pro ranks who might need some advice about what it takes to make that leap of faith and get up and running on the international circuit. Looking back over my very short career to date, these first two years have been a steep learning curve, and the more information someone a little "wet behind the ears" can gather the better. I personally think being a little older (25 years old for my first campaign) and more mature when getting started can be advantageous when dealing with the myriad of hurdles thrown in your way. It's allowed me to establish myself as a consistent performer. Most athletes can go a whole

career chasing a world championship title, so my victory at the World Duathlon Champs in my rookie season in 2006 is a great lesson to all eager juniors to be patient and make sure the time is right. I had completed a four-year university degree and worked for two years in the corporate sector before taking up a professional career.

Leading into my 2008 international campaign I must admit my self-confidence has never been higher. From my point of view I had a change in fortunes this Australian summer, keeping at bay my injury demons, and I was able to achieve some performances that if fit I know I can achieve on a regular basis. During the Australian season I was able to earn wins at the inaugural Geelong Ironman 70.3 and Aussie Long Distance Champs and was runner-up at XTERRA Australia. Congratulations to everyone else who set and achieved their goals—and if you didn't make your goals, I hope you're able to structure a training plan over the winter months that will bring you closer to fulfilling them next summer. By the time you are reading this I, and most of the other 50 odd Aussie professional triathletes will have jetted out for either Europe (predominantly ITU World Cup athletes) or Asia, or the United States (predominantly non-drafting and Ironman athletes).

The US summer season action kicked off with hot racing in May and all good news for the first weekend in May with more Aussie domination!

I made my second trip up the coast of California to Lake San Antonio for the running of the 26th edition of the Wildflower Triathlon Festival. This race is regarded as one of, if not the very toughest half Ironman races going around. The field for the men this year was touted as the best a race has seen in the past 12 months—something of a mini Hawaii hitout for the top shooters in the sport.

The appeal with this race is not just the racing but the great treatment afforded to the pros that make the trip to this remote corner of California. Athletes are provided with some unbelievable housing on the shores of Lake Nacimiento with breakfast, lunch and dinner provided throughout the weekend. Meanwhile, the poor age-groupers have to pitch a tent (or bring their own RV) and cook everything themselves on an open fire and share their showers with hundreds of others! But that camping and festival atmosphere keeps bringing them back.

The racing was fast and furious, with **Macca** taking his fourth Wildflower crown ahead of **Eneko Llanos** of Spain, with America's super cyclist **Chris Lieto** smashing the previous bike record and setting himself for a great third place to round out the podium. **Chris Legh** should also get a mention for a gutsy fourth. My day got off to a bad start with a mechanical 30mins prior to the kickoff, but I was able to have the problem fixed and make the start line with a few minutes to spare. A stand-down

penalty early on the cycle leg further compounded a bad day all around and I battled through to finish eighth ahead of another notable result from my great training partner and travel companion for 2008, Aussie **Joe Gambles**, who crossed in ninth. **Pip Taylor** had a great race to finish on the podium in third place in a strong women's field.

Across the continent in the beautiful surrounds of the US Virgin Islands **Craig Alexander** put in another stellar performance at Ironman 70.3 St Croix to take his fourth crown at this event, ahead of other Aussies. Boston based **Richie Cunningham** was third and Miami-based up-and-comer **Paul Ambrose** was fifth. Ironman 70.3 Champion **Mirinda Carfrae** cruised to a comfortable 10min victory in the women's race.

Cheers, Griffo



DO THE DU: The run-bike-run is a great challenge

Newcastle to host duathlon champs

Duathlon is returning to Newcastle this year as the city plays host again to the Australian & Oceania Duathlon Championships. Race day will be 24 August.

Last year's championships in Newcastle were cancelled at the last minute in extreme weather but Newcastle has hosted high profile duathlon races previously. In 2005 the Duathlon World Championships were staged in the NSW city with a tough course around the Foreshore and beaches.

Veteran race director Mark Emerton, who was also involved in the world championship race in Newcastle, has stepped in as event manager with an eye toward making sure duathlon stays in Newcastle for the long term. He'll work alongside race director Garry Muir.

The 2008 Newcastle Port Corporation Australian & Oceania Duathlon Championships is expected to draw hundreds of athletes to tackle a 10km run, 40km bike and 5km run course with shorter events on offer for kids and beginners. "Our focus is to bring the whole family and create a day involving a run, ride, run and fun," Emerton said.

Race info at www.eliteenergy.com.au



BEAST-MASTER: Crowie dominates "The Beast" and wins in St Croix again

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