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TRANSITION TWO /
Review

GRIFFO'S IRONMAN DEBUT

Leon Griffin on the highs and lows of his preparation for the big step up to Ironman racing

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Former world duathlon champion Leon Griffin describes his introduction to the world of ultra-distance triathlon.



DRIVING: Leon Griffin enjoyed his first crack at Ironman

Eight hours, 24 minutes... that's my starting point time.

It's a time I should be extremely happy with, according to the vast majority of people I have talked to since the race.

The beauty of participating and completing the Ironman was not lost on me throughout the day in Busso, as my thoughts would often drift between "Wow, I'm having a ball out here," to "This is so much fun, why haven't I done some of these earlier?"

—all while taking in the spectacular scenery the West Australian coast delivers.

But I'm one of those ultra-competitive buggers who wants to win, win and win some more, whether it's my first Ironman or my 20th. Put up a start and finish line and I'll be hell-bent on getting there before anyone else. So if you compliment me on a sixth, fifth, fourth place, etc, don't be surprised if I seem a little disappointed in myself.

In Ironman everyone has a million stories to tell about their day, and mine is no more interesting than the next guy. Instead, I'll try to provide an insight into everything else that went into a professional's first Ironman—how I made the leap to the full distance and some of the differences in preparation between a pro and an age-grouper.

If you're looking to do your first Ironman in the near future—or if you've already done one, five or 25—hopefully you can take something away from this article, work it into your preparation and hopefully get to the finish line that little bit faster.

BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

Everyone has a reason for deciding to sign on and tackle the enormity of completing an Ironman. For me, it was a case of timing. I had completed approximately 20 half Ironmans and always wanted to step up, but there were many factors holding me back.

Then I received an email from the pro liaison for Ironman in Australia, Shane Smith, while I was holidaying in New York City last July.

The email went something like: "Hey Griff, just checking in to see if you are still interested in tackling your first Ironman in Australia, more specifically Ironman Western Australia later this year. If so, let me know and we'll try and help you as best we can to get you to the start line."

I told Smithy I'd think about it while holidaying for the next two weeks and give him an answer when I returned home, knowing full well I had decided to commit. I planned to do a block of altitude training and race in the States for a few months before returning home a few weeks before the Ironman.

Those plans went out the window only two weeks into my stint back at my base in Boulder, Colorado, when Merridee called with the dreadful news her mum had been diagnosed with cancer—her second bout in 12 months!

So the bags were packed again and I was back home by the end of the week, before she'd even been rolled into the operating theatre. While my immediate thoughts and energies were with Merridee and her family, I had to change tack and move to plan B—but at that stage there was no plan B.

I was lucky the Australian season was just beginning. We have a smorgasbord of events on offer to use as key hit-outs in preparation for the big one in December, with half Ironmans at Yeppoon, the Gold Coast, Port Macquarie and Shepparton; the Olympic distance race at Noosa and other state-based domestic series such as the Gatorade Supersprint Series.

I had planned to complete the Gold Coast Half Ironman (nine weeks out), Noosa (five weeks), Shepparton Half Ironman (three weeks) and a Gatorade Series sprint triathlon (two weeks). This program was heavier than my ideal preparation, and I wouldn't recommend it for an age-grouper working a full-time job. But I hadn't raced seriously since the end of June and I needed to feel the burn in the lungs that only racing provides.

As it turned out, I missed the Gold Coast half while down with the flu for three weeks before withdrawing from Noosa three-quarters of the