

**Determination, guts and mag-phos.** pushed Brian Bennett through his first Ironman event, in Taupo, NZ, on March 6.

Here are some of his most poignant memories of the event.

Brian finished third of 26 competitors in the M60-64 group, with times of:

swim 1.23.40

ride 6.18.28

run 4.34.23

Total including two transitions - 12.37.45

### **The course**

Taupo is a delightful tourist town about the size of Busselton, right in the middle of the north island of NZ, on the northern shore of the freshwater Lake Taupo (which is the size of Singapore).

Bike ride goes north from Taupo to the tiny village of Reporoa (on the road to Rotarua, the hot springs tourist town). Reporoa is about 45 km from Taupo. You ride to Reporoa and back, twice.

The run goes east from Taupo, more or less along the north of the lake for about 10.5 km, before turning back to Taupo. You do this twice.

Both the ride and the run have a few hills, but no mountains.

### **Memories are made of...pain?**

by

Brian Bennett

WEEKS of mounting nerves culminate with the loud sound of the cannon at 7am. Instantly the nerves are gone and the muscles begin to work. The cold calm Lake Taupo is no longer cold or calm and suddenly the only sensation is of arms and legs thrashing as more than 1200 swimmers try to swim while avoiding others' limbs and heads.

At one time, I experienced the creepy feeling of someone trying to climb onto my back, before realising that he or she was only trying to go forward!

### **Cramp**

About two kilometres into the swim I started to cramp, first in one and then in both calves. I was able to control this, as I had done in training, by bending the feet and toes up towards the knees. Although this slows one down, by creating drag, it's better than having to stop and I kept swimming until about 700m from the end: here the cramp increased suddenly and sharply.

I shouted out to the nearest support boat for help - without which I would have drowned. As it motored alongside me, I grabbed it and this then enabled me to throw my feet into the boat, while remaining in the water.

I shouted to one of the volunteers in the boat, begging him to bend the front of my feet upwards as hard as possible. He did this and it had the desired effect of easing the cramp.

I was invited to get into the boat but I rejected the offer, knowing that it would result in disqualification. Fortunately, because I often cramp, I had anticipated the problem and carried a small pump-spray of 'Cramp-stop' (magnesium phosphate) in my wetsuit and was able to take a few puffs, just as an asthma sufferer does with a Ventolin puffer.

I also swallowed a few mag.phos. tablets.

After a couple of minutes of holding onto the boat I was able to start swimming again, tentatively at first. I continued, expecting the cramp to return but it didn't although the fear that it would caused me to forget to urinate in the last part of the swim and I had to waste a couple of minutes going the toilet at the swim/bike transition!

### **Transition 1**

This transition, which includes an uphill run of about 400 metres from the end of the swim to where

the bikes are, took me about 13 minutes (which I put down to inexperience). Other competitors took, on average, 7 mins 14 secs.

The ride went well at first with crisp air and a light tailwind but got harder as the end got nearer and the tailwind freshened and shifted between being a very strong crosswind to a headwind at places.

At about 168km into the ride, when I thought I was getting near to the top of what had been a long gentle climb of about 10km, my quads were starting to burn and threatening to go on strike. Shortly thereafter the gradient became noticeably steeper, forcing me into my lowest gear. I was down to walking pace and feared that, with feet in the cleats, falling off could spell the end of my race.

Anyone who hasn't ridden in cleats might not know that one needs to stop pedalling for a second or so to pull one's feet out of the cleats and that when on an uphill, going slowly, that will result in the bike stopping and, over you go, before you can get a foot onto the ground!

### **U-turn**

I could sense there were two options: the first and safer was to do a U-turn and increase my speed enough to pull my feet out of the cleats and get off the bike. This would have enabled me to push the bike up the hill enough to give the quads a short rest and avoid the possibility of falling off, but would have cost a few minutes; the other option was to try to keep pushing with all of the little strength that was left in my legs while also trying to help them by pulling as hard as possible on the handlebars to avoid slowing more and falling.

While not dismissing the first option, I continued pedalling as hard as I could for the most painful few minutes I have ever had on a bike and managed to keep moving just fast enough to avoid falling, until the gradient eased and I knew I could make it to the top of the hill. From there I knew it was only a gentle incline of about two km to the highest point of the route and that the very welcome downhill of about eight km into Taupo was all that would be left of the ride, and that then I could get onto my feet and start doing what I enjoy, namely running. Wrong!

### **Loo stop**

I had not stopped at all while on the ride, to eat, or even to urinate, although I had been wanting to go for about the last 80km. So my visit to the loo at the second transition was a relatively lengthy affair. At first I couldn't find what I needed to find to do the deed; and then I started to worry that the nice lady volunteer who had kindly offered to hold my bike while I was passing enough water to fill Lake Taupo might have other tasks to attend to; but as you know, at times, water will only flow at a certain rate!

Eventually, after 8mins and 12secs (the average was 3mins 52secs), I started to try to run.

### **No joke**

The hamstrings told the brain 'you're joking'.

An uneasy truce was reached whereby the legs agreed to walk/jog for about a kilometre or so, before a major muscle on the inside of the right thigh cramped so badly that all I could do was stand on my left foot for a couple of minutes, enduring pain which I could see reflected in the eyes of well-wishing spectators.

Their faces said that they felt very sorry that it was the end of the road for me. But they had obviously never seen the likes of the mag.phos miracle cure. My pain was so intense that I fumbled, moving just enough to get a few of the tablets ever so gently out of my little money pocket; several fell onto the ground. A well-wishing spectator picked them up for me because I could still not bend down at all. I could still only stand there. The slightest move brought on intense spasms. I swallowed one magnesium capsule and about eight little mag.phos tabs, which dissolve quickly in the mouth. Miraculously, within one to two minutes of swallowing these, I could move my right leg, slowly, but enough to start walking and then, after another minute or so, I was able to jog slowly.

But with this pain so fresh in my memory and the knowledge that there was still more than 40km to go, I did not think there was much hope of finishing the race. However, thanks to my mag.phos (and a bit of training) that proved to be the worst part of my marathon.

I continued to feel better until about the 30km mark when exhaustion slowly started to weaken me. I then took another mag capsule 'just in case' and was able to keep jogging, without any more cramp, to the finish line.

I must have been too exhausted to see the clock at the finish because I was happy in my belief that I had finished in just under 14 hours. It therefore came as a pleasant surprise when my brother then told me a bit later that I had done it in 12 h 37mins and 45secs.

**Great aftermath!**

After about an hour I felt great, with no pain and just a bit stiff and sore, and when Marg went to bed a little later, tired from standing for most of the previous 15 hours, my brother and I did what you do after an ironman in New Zealand: stay up and watch the Super 14 rugby on TV!

Without the months of help of Marg, and my brother Clive, who supplied me with magnesium, I would definitely not have been able to complete the race and therefore I feel deep gratitude to them both.

Brian Bennett

*See the photos of Brian's Ironman in the Road Gallery*