



Three into one...



...and go!

Taking on a Triathlon

Sue Bains

2013

Three into one and go!

I don't know if this story really begins today or whether it started with the germ of an idea planted during a chat with Flib (my eldest son's best man), or did it start with the purchase of my new bike.

"What sort of bike are you looking for?" the man in the bike shop asked
"I'm not sure really. I just want something faster than my mountain bike. Something that will stop fat old men from overtaking me when I'm cycling back from town." I replied.

I had recently felt humiliated by the number of cyclists who had sped past me along the Ecclesall Road in spite of my legs going at full effort – and I'm a marathon runner! So it had to be the bike's fault didn't it?

"You'll need this type" he said, pointing to a stereotypical city shopper bike.

"Ah but I haven't mentioned that I'm thinking about taking up triathlons" I said.

At this, the young man gave me one of those looks that, as you get older, you receive more and more. Thought bubbles rose from his head....ooo0000000...As if!! his expression spelt out.

To give him his due, he then showed us a range of "faster" bikes, told us that there was an excellent pre-used one that may possibly be the right size and that was it! My new bike was bought and sits in style in the garage. I've been out on it a few times and am slowly getting used to going downhill (going up is not as much of a problem!) and have every intention of getting even better... slowly.

Many months of snow, marathon training, marathon racing later I was out on a run with a group of Smiley Paces. During these runs, conversations form, progress, change and meander as positions in the line change. This particular day, I found myself with a youngish (seemed it to me anyway) woman who asked me whether I'd tried triathlons.

"No!" I replied "Though it's something I keep thinking I'd like to do"

"You want to try Matlock. It's really good for beginners and loads of Smileys do it. Its on the August bank Holiday weekend which will give you plenty of time to train" She said.

I went home with the idea firmly planted in my mind and after looking it up on the internet, it took no time to download the entry form... and this story really starts at this point!

Week 1 Tuesday 4 June 2013

Today, I've been for my first swimming training session. The Matlock entry form asks for the predicted time for the 400m swim and I had no idea. As this was preventing me from entering, I felt I had to find out and that involved – by necessity – going swimming.

Lane swimming is available at each of the 6 or so pools in Sheffield, but I decided to go to the nearest despite it being the oldest and most gruesome in appearance. In true beginner enthusiast style, I paid up front for a year's discount card, but at just £3, this is not in the same league as a gym membership. However, I will need to go 4 times to make it pay for the card. I had one of the "getting old" moments when I ordered the card online and was thanked for my payment... then nothing happened! I think I had expected to be able to download something, but nothing appeared forthcoming. On asking Tom (son and at 18 years old, an old hand at computer related business!) what he thought I should do, he scathingly informed me that I would collect it from the centre that I'd named as my preferred one. Which in fact, turned out to be exactly right – however annoying!



Heely Pool is the old Victorian style; pool in the middle of a vaulted hall with changing cubicles lining the longer sides. Entrances to Male and Female changing rooms and toilets were at one end and having been told I'd need 20p for the lockers, I headed into the female area, got undressed, pushed my bag and clothes into a locker, slotted the 20p, closed the door, turned the handle ... and nothing happened. I opened the door and the 20p had disappeared into the depths of the inside of the door, so I closed the door and tried again. Nothing! No way was I going to waste another 20p, so I extracted my clothes and, with some force, managed to get them all into my sports bag and after having a hot shower, took the bag out to the poolside.

This was it then! So I slipped into the water, pressed my Garmin and waited a minutes or so for it to find satellites. As if! Luckily I could set it to "no GPS" without needing to get my glasses and so set off with just a stop watch timer going.

My aim was simple. How long would it take to swim 400m. The watch was going and all I had to do was count lengths.except I hadn't thought to find out how long the pool was. Two lifeguards were patrolling the pool and as I reached the end of my 3rd length, I shouted out

“Excuse me. How long is this pool?”

“Oh! It's a strange length. 22 yards” she replied.

Now that was unexpected and not particularly useful without a calculator. I swam on, using my best breaststroke, trying to work out what this meant in lengths per 400m, but I soon found that my brain doesn't work well in water. By the time I'd gone from 25 lengths to 15 lengths, I'd returned to the end with the attendant.

“Sorry!” She shouted. “I meant 22 metres”

“Thanks!” I gasped back.

So, 22 metres. That's 3 short of the 25 metres I'd been expecting, so for the 16 lengths I thought I'd have to do, I was 48m short which was 2 and a bit lengths. So I needed to do 18-ish lengths. I'd do 19 then.

At 19 lengths I stopped my watch and was pleased to see 14 minutes and 29 seconds. A lot less than the 16 minutes I'd set as a ball-park maximum. So I stopped, got dried and dressed, checked the length with the receptionist (yes! 25 yards) and went home.

That afternoon, I posted my entry and received an email confirmation. Matlock triathlon here I come!

Week 2 Monday 10 June 2013

A Monday morning and, I think this indicates my feeling about swimming at the moment, the sinking knowledge that I've got to go to the swimming pool again. No time like the present, so timetable consulted, I made a decision that it wasn't too early to get the bike/swim thing going and hauled my bike out of the garage.

I'd organised my swimming kit into my bright orange Nike bag and squashing it down, fitted it snugly under the sprung bar on the back of the bike. However, what I hadn't realised was just how tight the clearance must be between my leg and the big rack as I get on. The first attempt to 'mount' the bike ended in embarrassing defeat as my leg hit



the bag and refused to raise high enough to get on. My inability to balance with one leg in the air, resulted in me overbalancing and performing a dance with the bike which fortunately didn't end on the floor. This all happened at the front of the house, but luckily no one appeared to see (or if they did, they obviously assumed – correctly – that I wouldn't want to know).

I considered going back in and replacing the bag with a rucksack, but couldn't be bothered – if I went back in, I probably would change my mind entirely. So leaning the bike further towards me, I took a deep breath and swung my leg up and over the bag. Success! I was on the bike and ready to go.

As I live on a steep hill, the first half mile is downhill and, on a cloudy morning in Sheffield, felt windy and cold. One of the things that frustrates me about swimming is the need to get clothes back on to a damp body, so the solution is to wear as little as possible – hence sandals (no socks), shorts, tee shirt and hoodie. Not enough for a cold bike ride, but it was too late to do anything about it and I was sure I'd get warm going back uphill later.



The ride to the pool probably takes less time to cycle than it has to write about it. At approximately 2 miles, it's an easy ride, only made more challenging by its gradient profile – steep down > steep up > steep down. I was quite impressed by the speed I was allowing myself to go down before my hand squeezed the brakes in an automatic survival reaction! I should have got my Garmin going to I could keep an eye on the speed I get up to – next time!

I felt quite an old-hand as I showed my “Life card” and paid to go into the pool. I didn't attempt the lockers this time and pushed my limited wardrobe into the bag and took it to the poolside with me. The shallow end was roped off for an adult swimming class, so I got in the deep end, swam two slow lengths (that's the warm up I'd been told to do) then got started on the planned session.

OK. That's a bit of an exaggeration! I sort of thought that I'd try swimming crawl this time, but assumed that would be slow and leisurely. However, as I set off for my first length of crawl, I realised that I wasn't doing anything leisurely. In fact, by the time I'd got to the floating barrier – probably about 18m – I was

panting hard! I turned and swam breast stroke back to the deep end. Oh... my... god! This was a lot harder than I had expected.

At the deep end, I stopped and waited for my Garmin to get back to the top and repeated the two part-lengths. Just as hard, but I was getting into a rhythm. After about 10 minutes, the barrier was removed, and I suddenly had a full length in front of me! Looking at my watch showed that I was doing roughly 25 seconds for the crawl length and 40 seconds for the breast stroke return. Now compared to last week's 400m at about 45 sec per length, those times would produce a 400m of 9 minutes and 45 seconds! Wow! What an improvement.... Except... I had to have a 30 second recovery between each pair of lengths so making 14 minutes and 15 seconds! Useless!

A man swimming in the lane next to me (the "fast" lane), stopped whilst I was in a recovery period and said that I needed to get some goggles if I want to swim properly - implying that I wasn't doing it properly as yet! We exchanged a few words about what I was trying to do and he assured me that it would get easier, particularly if I got some goggles! So that's it then... goggles next!

Anyway, I continued with this up crawl and back breast stroke for 29 minutes, then decided I would do crawl for the down AND back last lap – AS IF!! I did the down length, turned and got about half way back before I thought I would DIE!! So a swift change to breast stroke had me shamefacedly finishing and panting heavily as I tried to look elegant hauling myself out of the pool.

Once changed, I walked out to the car park where I'd tied up my bike. Oh! did I ache! Every muscle in my body was screaming for a nice comfy car to creep into and cruise up the hills back home. But no! All I had was a bike and with the bag replaced on the back carrier I had to use some steps to get my leg high enough to get on it! Wet hair, damp bare feet, shoulders so tired they didn't want to hold my neck in place and I set off home.

In fact, the bike is so light and brilliant that the hills were not as bad as I thought they would be and I was soon tipping myself off the bike outside the front door. Lunch and a good sleep ahead!

This MUST get easier!



Week 3



I've bought goggles and a swimming hat. There were tens of different goggles aimed at a range from the "recreational swimming and pool activities" to the "high intensity training" all priced accordingly. I settled for something in the middle described as for the "passionate swimmer and occasional training swim" along with a bright pink hat so the rescue crew can pick me out easily!

Monday had been designated as a non-running day and with a dentist appointment taking up most of the morning and the need to let my mouth return to usual before attempting to swim, I didn't set off until after lunch. This time I packed my kit in a rucksack – good move – mounted the bike with no problems and cycled happily to the pool. Once changed, swimming hat pulled on and goggles in place I got in and started my Garmin.

The plan was to do 2 lengths front crawl, followed by 2 lengths breaststroke repeated for a total of 18 lengths – timed! In my head I thought I'd be able to cut at least 2 minutes off my previous time, but the crawl lengths were so hard, that I needed to do the breaststroke lengths at a snail's pace (do snails swim?) to recover sufficiently to be able to do the next crawl stint. Oh dear! It was so hard! I could feel that I was moving quicker with crawl, but by the end of the length, my lungs were bursting and the return leg was a fight against total wipeout. I even tried swimming crawl with my head above water, but it was so ungainly and I found myself wallowing from side to side, losing the straightest route and even bumping into other swimmers.

At the end of 18 lengths, I stopped the watch. 13 minutes and 20 seconds! That's only 6 seconds faster than the breaststroke lengths I did on my first visit! Depressed and with little idea what I need to do next, I swam a few more lengths, got out and cycled home.

I must admit to having some real doubts now about my ability to compete in a triathlon. I'm not a "let's just finish" type person and I know that I will be mortified if I can't do it well, but swimming seems so hard compared with running. Was I just an idiot to enter so soon? Should I have done some more

training so that I knew what I was – or wasn't – capable of before entering. Oh dear!

Friday 28 June 2013

I've been swimming again, this time without the bike ride to get there. It seemed a little bit easier! I did the same session as last time- 2 breaststroke, 2 crawl for 18 lengths and although I didn't time myself (I wanted to concentrate on getting the crawl breathing right rather than the time) I think it was quicker than last time. Breathing is a real issue! I find 2 whole strokes too long between breaths and 1 whole stroke too short so I tried 1 ½ which meant that I was alternating the side I turned my head. It felt very funny, but worked for a bit. As I get more tired, I seem to cope less well, but maybe this will improve.

Monday 1 July 2013

Mo-Jo back and working! Yesterday was the Hathersage Hilly Triathlon and the superb performance of Isobel (one of the Smiley Paces) who won the Women 50 category, has really spurred me on to get back on with the training. I downloaded the results and scanned the split times to get some idea of where I am in comparison with others. My swimming time undoubtedly is slow! Not the slowest, but close. My running time is faster than most of my age group, so that just left my bike riding ability as a great unknown.

There was only one thing for it! I needed to get out and do a timed bike ride. I dreamt about cycling all night, mostly about planning to ride, but not actually doing it! Am I subconsciously afraid of bike racing? Once up, I planned a 12 mile ride into town, back out up into the hills and back down to home – not an easy route by any means, but I wanted a hilly ride to be able to make a judgement against the only comparisons I've got.



As I had no idea at all what I can do, I decided that I wouldn't try to go all out and push it this time but try to keep to a pace that I knew I could maintain – speed can come later! So I set off down the hill – easy – and then up a 6 mile hill climbing nearly 1000ft of ascent – hard but doable.

When I reached the top and turned the corner to start the downhill return route, I was thrilled to see that I had maintained around 10mph in spite of the

hills! Going downhill on a bike is such a cheat! No effort! Then a final half mile back up hill to home with a total mileage of 13.73 in 1 hour 4 minutes which gave an average of a smidgeon over 5 minute miles and equivalent to 56 minutes and 42 seconds for 11 miles.

I think I can get faster, but I've not really got any idea how except to pedal harder! But I'm pleased with the time which compares with finishers around 2/3 of the way down the list for the Hathersage Hilly. I think I'll be happy with that position – as long as I'm not last!

Tuesday 6 August 2013

It's nearly 5 weeks since I last wrote anything. On 3rd July I had a steroid injection in my Morton's Neuroma and could only sit and wait for the swelling to go down for 3 or 4 days, then we went on holiday for 4 weeks.

My aim was to keep swimming and cycling, but not running. Every summer I try to take a break from running and I really feel that this year I need it to be a good long one. I didn't really rest after the marathon and I have been finding that I'm losing some of my running mojo. I also felt that a long break would give the effects of the injection longer to heal.

As far as triathlon preparation went, my explanation was that I would concentrate on improving my swimming and cycling whilst on holiday which would leave 3 weeks to hone my running again once I returned home. All very logical and sensible.

In fact I ran 3 times during the 4 week holiday; the first a 3 mile run in HOT sunshine along the shore of Lake Garda – OK but nothing special; the 2nd run was a disaster (more later) and the 3rd was a 5 mile run along Calais sea front – fine for a start of a new season.



Bike racked, kit laid out, nerves showing but ready to start.

Swimming! I did several sessions in a variety of water over the holiday. All were in open water and in most cases, it was not possible to measure any distance, so I made do with timing the session, making sure I spent at least 15 minutes swimming hard. The first one (Lake Maggiore) was done in hat, goggles and nose

clip but the strange looks I received from other bathers and the obvious embarrassment of Jes (husband) made me realise that this outfit was not really appropriate, so after that I made do with just the hat, and often not even that.

Open water is very different to pool swimming – that may seem obvious to any swimmer, but to someone who has only ever “bobbed” in the sea or lakes, trying to swim “properly” was quite new. Currents and wind direction made more of a difference than I had expected, but actually meant that the lengths done along with wind/current seemed slow compared with swimming against them with the water appearing to be flowing swiftly and a good sized bow wave forming in front of me! I also found myself swallowing MASSES of water (luckily not salted!) which wasn’t pleasant and resulted in me holding my head up further than I should have.



7:15am. The whistle blew and we were off!

The water temperature was about the same as the Sheffield pool, although one swim (in Lake Garda!) left me cold and shivering! I was, as Jes crossly informed me, the only person on the beach wearing a jumper and wrapping my blue fingers in a towel! I reckoned it was that the lake is fed from the mountains and at the north end, is very much colder than further down....?

Later in the holiday I tried swimming in my triathlon kit. Although swimming in a crop top was very comfortable, I was less happy with wearing it on the bike and felt very exposed, so back to running top. I also tried a swim and walk in wet pants! Again, no problem! This was going well.

The experiment that was less successful was the bike and run! We had gone from the campervan park on a bike ride, 12 miles along a path, turned back and a little way along, had a lovely (and enormous) tiramisu ice cream sundae sitting in the hot sunshine under a cloudless blue sky. During the return ride, I suggested that I got straight off the bike and ran for a mile. It seemed a good idea at the time! So I stormed up to the van, dumped my bike and glasses and started “running” back along the path.

Oh my god!!! My bike shoes are a lot less padded than my running shoes; I needed the loo; The ice cream wallowed in the base of my stomach! What was I doing? It felt like someone had got my spine and had forcibly twisted it backwards, whilst simultaneously cutting off all feeling to my legs. I was moving through treacle with no idea of what pace I was doing and 3 weeks of not running behind me. It was HELL!!!

I turned at the 2nd bridge (approximately half a mile) and forced my legs to get me back to the van where I collapsed on a seat feeling like death! What am I doing!!!!?

Cycling. Now this is coming on! I think I have made massive improvements since the start of the holiday. We started with quite short rides and gradually extended them to our longest... wait for this... a 110km ride to the centre of Frankfurt and back!! Admittedly it was along a bike path and was basically flat, but we did an average of 12 mph and it was a LONG way! Various other rides which were anything but flat gave me plenty of practice of gears and going up and down hills and I can say that I am far more confident than I was before we left. I think I need to get my speed up a bit, but maybe that'll come?

Anyway, back home now and time to get going properly. 3 weeks to go.

Thursday 8 August 2013.

I've been for 3 runs since I got back and it's so hard! I don't think I've lost fitness, it's just that my body needs to get used to the pounding again! I know the experts say it takes one week for every week off to get back into running again, so with 4 weeks off, I've got a few hard weeks to go.

Today I went for a bike ride and swim and was thrilled to find that I have taken a whole minute off my 400m time! My goggle leaked and made it impossible to swim crawl, but my breaststroke has really come on and I feel a lot more confident that I can do the swim in the 12:30 time I optimistically had predicted on my entry form.



Getting into my stroke!

Friday 10 August 2013

I found an article today about runners training for triathlons and the typical mistakes they make in swimming. I think the author has been watching me as he seemed to describe my issues exactly. It's unfortunate that I hadn't seen this earlier as it gave advice on training that I would have really benefitted from knowing 6 weeks ago. Never mind, I will use the swimming sessions left to have a go.



That's me in the pink hat carefully counting out the 16 lengths.

Basically, he asserted that running is 90% efficient in converting body energy to forward speed so the more you do, the better/faster you'll get and that you train to run fast by running faster. However, swimming even at world class level is only 10% efficient in converting body energy to forward speed so the only way to improve speed is to improve the efficiency system - and that's about HOW you swim.

He said that the typical runner gets in the pool and frantically swims up and down believing that by doing that, somehow they will get faster, whereas in reality all they are doing is wasting energy and establishing bad habits!!! (I definitely think he saw me in Heeley Pool!). Anyway, the conclusion is that it's the drills, slow swimming and concentrating on perfecting style, breathing, body position etc that improves efficiency and therefore speed. He said that 2 to 3 times a week for 6 weeks should get a runner with basic swimming ability, to a "respectable" pace (which seems is about 2 to 2:30mins per 100m). So I've got 2½ weeks to adopt a completely different mindset! Oh well! next time..... (WHAT!!!!)

Saturday 11 August 2013

I felt it was time I hit the roads and to try a bike ride at a good pace, so I plotted out a predominately flat route to Rotherham and back and donning my new bike jersey and gloves, I set out to ride as fast as I could – safely – along traffic infested roads.

I was surprised by how confident I felt in traffic – even being able to look behind me without wobbling. I was hoping to exceed 12mph so was very pleased to



Out of the pool and running across the tarmac to the T1 bike area.

reach 11 miles in just over 45 minutes, although I was aware that the triathlon course includes 3 miles of hills.

I also learned that reading a map whilst cycling on roads is very difficult, resulting in missing a turning and finding myself on the extremely busy A630 – a dual carriageway linking the M1 to Sheffield and traffic zooming at motorway speeds with little regard for the novice cyclist. However, I survived and arrive home elated and buzzing.

A bit of geeky spreadsheet analysis showed that the best 8 flat and down hill miles, plus the worst 3 uphill miles would give me 46 minutes for my 11 mile race – I'll settle for that happily!

Thursday 15 August 2013

Back to the pool to try and improve my swimming style as the paper had suggested. I'm finding the cycle route very much easier than before and hardly seemed to notice the hill up from Hunter's Bar. That's got to be a good sign!

So I was soon into the pool and attempting to swim lengths with longer strokes and putting my head under the water at each stroke, concentrating on kicking back hard, then elongating as long as I could. It was OK except that my goggles filled with water making it necessary to stop at least every other length to empty them. I had intended not to count lengths so that I could think about style and not speed, and although I had thought it would be impossible, I actually did forget where I was and how many I had done.

After 15 minutes I tried a couple of lengths of crawl which made my goggles completely give up and resulted in me not being able to see where the end of the pool was. I give up! Goggles abandoned I tried a couple more lengths, but my eyes were stinging and I was tired and fed up.

Before I finished, I'd decided I should try a racing dive – a skill I last used probably 40 years ago! Fortunately, this seems to be a skill my body has held onto and although it felt strange, I believe that I can do these OK. So at least I can get the first length started off well!

A damp, hilly cycle home had me sweating, but with a sense of achievement – in some ways!

I MUST buy some new goggles!

Saturday 17 August 2013

I'd intended going for a long bike ride today, but the Smiley Paces running group had put on a training session for the Magic Mile competition which I was keen to do. So I decided I am confident enough now to cycle to the training session and permit my running friends to see me on a bike (Seriously! It had taken a long while to get to this stage). I will admit to feeling a little bit proud as one of the women asked me if I was a triathlete, allowing me to reply that I was doing my first in a couple of weeks.

I don't know if a bike ride is a good warm up for running training, but I did the practice race in 6 minutes and 39 seconds – a far faster mile time than I had expected! Maybe this cross-training is doing more good than I had thought!

Monday 19 August 2013

I went on the internet and downloaded the bike course for the triathlon and Jes and I went to Matlock to try it out. We parked on the road outside the Leisure Centre (where it will all happen next week) and started off at quite a leisurely pace along the main roads through Matlock and Matlock Baths.

The first thing that hit me was how cold it was. This was 9:30am and the wind against me (I think it's ALWAYS against you on a bike!) and was making me feel quite uncomfortable. I was glad I had put my bike jersey over my tri-top, but it started me thinking a bit more about how I will cope next week.

Traffic lights! Who put them on a race course?! It didn't seem that we had been going more than a few seconds when we had to stop, then stop again, then go through pedestrian crossings.... Are you allowed to go through red lights during a race?



Getting started on the transition business!

Anyway, a flatish stretch through the gorge alongside the river with the high cliffs rising on both sides – beautiful! Then up through the busy Baths and out past the old mills and down to Cromford – the scene of the start of my first marathon! We had a bit of a concern about notices telling us that there was a “Road Closed” ahead of us, but decide to ignore it. Luckily the closed road was not the one we were heading on, so we continued to follow the river, gently undulating to 5.3 miles where a left turn took us to the start of the hill.

In its early stages, I found the hill relatively OK and change gears so I could manage the gradient. With Jes ahead of me, I didn’t attempt to do anything more than cycle steadily – I just hope I won’t push too hard next week. It all seemed quite straightforward until we got to the 7 mile point where the hill appeared to steepen considerably and even in bottom gear, I had to stand in the pedals to get up it. This was quite a pivotal moment as I would usually get off and push on this gradient, but I realised that I HAD to get up it, or I would lose all confidence of being able to do it in the race. I admit that it was hard, very hard, but I got to the top with a massive sense of achievement and although the hill continued for another mile, it was less steep and far easier to climb.



It took a fair amount of time to get socks and shoes on.

At 8 miles we got to the junction with the main road and the summit of the climb. For a glorious 2½ miles, we whizzed downhill with the cold air rushing past. I tried to pedal as I descended and to keep my hands off the brakes – again an indication of my increased confidence! Reaching Matlock and traffic, we wove in and out of the queues, through the town centre and back along to the van.

We hadn’t worked hard or tried to cycle fast, yet had done the nearly 12 mile route in 55 minutes! I was WELL pleased!

Later

I have received my starting information for the triathlon... I start at 7:15am!!! WHAT!!! That means leaving home at about 6:00am or earlier!!! However am I going to manage that!!?

On a more positive note, I am in the pool with 7 other “slow” swimmers so will not be too disheartened by fast swimmers whizzing past.

I should be finished by 9:00am.... So what do I do with the rest of the day...?

Another geeky spreadsheet using the competitor's estimated swim times and making totally false and unjustified assumptions of running and bike paces being correlated to swim times, allowed me to calculate when and where I will be overtaken by the faster competitors – some of whom only start their swim at 8:30am! I am pleased that I should be well towards the end of the bike ride before that happens! In my dreams!

Tuesday 20 August 2013

Deciding it was time to try a 25m length pool, I cycled into Sheffield to try out Ponds Forge International Pool. No, its not just 25m long, its 25m wide and lane swimming is done across the pool! And what a lovely pool it is!

A helpful attendant spent some time showing me a range of goggles and once purchased, I was soon changed into my tri pants and top and walking into the pool area. There were about 8 lanes marked out SLOW, MEDIUM and FAST with alternate ones being Anticlockwise and Clockwise. Decisions! I did a slow dive into a SLOW lane and came up to do a couple of lengths of crawl, only to hit the back of the swimmer in front. So I dipped under the marker floats and went into a MEDIUM lane only to catch up with an elderly gentleman who was in no hurry to reach the side. The next medium lane appeared busy, so I dipped again into a FAST lane.

As there were only two of us in this lane, it was fine for what I wanted and I tried a few lengths of alternate crawl and breaststroke. The goggles were great – no water at all, but I still couldn't get to grips with the breathing for crawl. This was possibly my last swimming session and I am still undecided about what stroke to use. Come on Sue! Make a decision.... I will swim breaststroke!

So concentrating on getting as much length per stroke as I could (I had lost count totally of the number of lengths/widths I had done) I timed each set of 2 widths and was delighted to see that I was doing around 90 seconds per 50m! If I can keep that up, it will give me 12 minutes! WOW!



Bike off and ready to leave T1

This was motivational stuff and I continued for 25 minutes by which time I was feeling near-cramps in my leg and calf muscles, so hauling myself out of the water, I shuffled out to the changing room, panting like I'd swum the channel! Once on the bike, I headed home feeling good.

Wednesday 21 August 2013

I must mention today's event as I'm so thrilled with my performance. My running friend Jenny organised a mile race for Smiley Paces runners as part of the Marathon Talk 2013 Magic Mile and 14 of us took part in a local park on a marked mile course.

As we had done in previous training sessions, we warmed up by jogging the course which allowed me to talk to Isobel – a triathlete of some experience and success and only a few years younger than me. I knew she had taken part in the Matlock Triathlon last year, so used our warm-up time to get some questions answered. She was so positive and assured me that I would really enjoy it and willingly answered my questions about fuelling during the events, transitions and clothing. Her encouragement made me feel a little more confident about my preparations although knowing that she can do the 400m swim in 7½ minutes made me feel that I am just playing at this!

Anyway, Jenny then led us through a series of drills which aimed at making us move our legs faster and improve our running style. The strange thing is that although you feel daft doing the drills, they really do increase your belief that you can run fast. We then went straight to the start for our timed mile.



Just a quick check as I didn't want to be disqualified for getting on my bike too early!

I finished 7th in 6 minutes 38 seconds!! A new PB!! The actual race was horrible; burning chest and throat with legs that just pleaded to stop going so fast. Such a lovely feeling of achievement at the end though.

The only down side of the day was visiting the consultant about my foot and being told that he couldn't do anything to "cure" it without the process being detrimental to my running and being told to come back in

10 year's time when I couldn't run anymore, then he'd be able to do something. Although I totally agreed with everything he said, it was a disappointment as I had really hoped that he'd be able to get rid of the pain of the Neuroma *and* cure my arthritic big toe *and* allow me to continue working on improving my running. Maybe it's a good thing that I'm trying a triathlon as the cross training could well help to extend my running career.

Friday 23 August 2013

Woooo! Swim time today for 400m.... wait for it... 11 minutes and 36 seconds!! That's a whole 2 minutes less than my time when I had just started!

I'd gone to Ponds Forge again to concentrate on doing the 25m length and found a lane that allowed me to swim at my pace without too often colliding with other swimmers. I really tried to concentrate on swimming a slow, but controlled stroke with the push forward held as long as I could and was so pleased to see a regular 1 minute 25 for the double length (50m). The goggles and nose clip are really working well and give me confidence to hold my head under water whilst I do the forward push. I still swallow far too much water, but even that has improved. Once I'd done the 16 lengths, I continued with 8 more at a slightly slower pace to focus on the style, during which I got the number of strokes per length down from 22 to 16. I'm not sure I have the confidence to do this is the race as my brain keeps telling me that to swim fast you have to move your arms fast and although I now know this is not true, the excitement of a race may get the better of me.



A nice steady mount onto the bike!

I've been to Decathlon and bought a spare inner tube, pump and tyre levers which all fit in a little bag that hangs under my saddle. I have practised pumping up the tyre from flat, but I don't want to take the wheels off my bike at this stage to try a complete change. I'll just have to hope that, if I get a puncture, someone will come along and help who knows what to do – at least I'll have the right equipment!

Saturday 24 August 2013

Today's log isn't about swimming, running or cycling, it's about mind over matter. I can remember the pre-marathon dreams and night worries, but at least that was just one activity. My nights now seems to be taken up with a rotating set of dreams during which I can't get into the pool because it's too packed with swimmers; I can't cycle because the road is covered in stones; and I can't run because the powder paint they've used to decorate the hedges (yes really!) is getting into noses and suffocating the runners! So I wake up and lie worrying about everything, although I really don't think I've got anything really to worry about.

Why doesn't my sub-consciousness allow me to enter a competition without causing me so much pre-event concern? I can only assume that, whatever my sensible, pragmatic mind thinks about me only doing it to finish and nothing else matters, the truth is that I desperately want to do well and not let myself down. I really fear being the object of pity or, even worse, of ridicule. I know I've trained as hard as I could have in the time I've had since entering it, but I also know how far I am from being a cyclist or swimmer. I really wonder what I think I am doing! My family and Jenny have been wonderfully encouraging and are fully behind me and I know they will be proud of whatever I do....

A post on the Smiley Paces Facebook page has provided information about other competitors and although I have tried to join in with the banter, I am daunted by the confident approach of the others and their ability to joke about matching nail varnish and tri-suit. I really wish I was more self-assured but maybe that is just the novice in me.



Downhill to get started.

Tomorrow I'm going to rest and meditate!

Monday 26 August 2013

I'd like to say that I woke to the alarm, but having spent the night in a state of worried restlessness interspersed with vivid dreams of triathlon disasters, I gave up at 4:45am, turned off the alarm and started the day. I'd packed all my kit and other bits the night before and my bike

was standing in the hallway, so there was little to do except force down breakfast, a cup of tea and take several visits to the loo.

By 5:30, we were breaking the peace and silence of a bank holiday morning as we backed the van out onto the dark road and with the dawn breaking, headed over the peaks to Matlock.

We arrived and parked on the road – a height barrier prevented us from going up to the leisure centre – but this provided a short walk to get legs stretched and later, a bolt hole away from the general buzz of other competitors arriving. It was early enough that few others had arrived so we were able to have a look at the pool and transition areas and make decisions about where to put my transition box and where Jes should stand to collect my goggles.



Smile for the photographers!

After getting stuck getting into my Triathlon top last week (any woman who has experienced the way a tight top can form a tight roll that lodges itself just under arm pits and refused to unroll, will know what I mean) I had arrived ready dressed. Although initially I felt a little exposed walking round in my kit, once I'd registered and had my number – 32 – inscribed in permanent ink on my calf, I began to feel like a real competitor.

Unlike a pre-marathon wait and warm up, the time went incredibly fast and there was little time for nerves to take hold. Having placed the kit box in Transition 2, I “racked” my bike and laid out the towel, talcum powder, shoes, socks, glasses and cycle helmet as I'd been advised in the order that I was intending to put them on. Other competitors obviously hadn't had the same advice and although my arrangement was questioned, later observation of the “real” triathletes showed that I had been given the right advice.

All too soon it was time to go to the pool so to the ‘Good Luck’ wishes from Jes and other Smileys standing around the area, I entered the pool and joined the queue.

The 7:00am starters were all competitors who had estimated their time as 20 minutes or more, so it was surprising to see not only competitors finishing in

less than 10 minutes, but the speed some of them were ploughing up and down the pool. I can only assume some of them gave a wrong time so that they could get both an early start and emptier roads for the bike section. However, that's only a theory!

Again, there was almost no wait before numbers 25 to 32 were called and each competitor placed at the end of a swimming lane. I had time to wave quickly at Jes and receive back a welcome thumbs up sign and at one minute before start time, we were allowed to get in the water – no racing dive then! At exactly 7:15am, a whistle blew and we were off.

The Swim: 7:15am



Helmet and glasses off and running out of the 2nd transition

I was lucky getting 32 as this meant that I was in the end lane and, as they filled up each set of swimmers from lane 1 to 8, if any set of 8 had a swimmer missing, then lane 8 wasn't used! So in fact, I had most of the swim in a lane to myself!

I could only really see the man in lane 7, as the lanes further away were so full of splashing swimmers that it was impossible to make out who was in my tranche.

However, my neighbour did provide a passing interest as he bombed out a couple of lengths of crawl with his head out of the water, arms flailing and body rolling from side to side. After these he must have felt that it was too exhausting so he swapped it for breaststroke – again with arms going like the clappers. He kept slightly ahead of me throughout, although the difference didn't seem to increase and he got out at the end just a few seconds in front of me.

My swimming training certainly paid off and I set off with as long and slow a stroke as I could make myself do and I managed to keep it going throughout. I could just make out the clock on the wall above me which allowed me to see that I was going slightly faster than I had managed even at my last training session! I was using my stopwatch for this section so when I finally finished the 16 lengths and swam back the couple of feet to climb up the stairs (No way was I going to attempt to haul myself out of the pool without steps!) I was absolutely thrilled to see my time was 11:21.

What long way I have come from that 13:38 back in June!

Transition 1

I'm sure I was supposed to run from the pool to the bike, but 57 years of being told "Don't Run!" at swimming pools was obviously more ingrained than I had imagined! However, once out of the side door into the open area with friends and family cheering loudly, I broke into a run towards my bike.

I had already poured talc into each sock and had been told that after a quick wipe of feet on the towel, my feet should slip easily into them. I think the point I had missed was that, at the best of times, I struggle to put socks on standing up and with wet legs slipping along each other as I tried to balance, the job felt almost impossible. Maybe, in hindsight, I should have sat down, but I didn't even think of it and persevered in forcing feet into socks, wobbling badly. It took a couple of tries to get my trainers on but that was more to do with my need to know that my bad foot was as comfortable as I could make it than any difficulty in getting them on. Finally, I put on my glasses and helmet and lifted my bike off the rack.

I had seen several cyclists doing the "scoot and swing leg over" method of mounting their bikes, but I knew I had to get on whilst the bike was still, or I would be in real trouble. So I wheeled it to the edge of the transition area, checked with the marshal that it was OK to get on, and with a grin to everyone cheering at the sides, set off down the steep hill to the road.

The Bike Ride: 7:29am

For the last few weeks I had been telling everyone that this was the section I was looking forward to the most and it didn't disappoint. Although it was only 7:30am the temperature was fine and with little wind, it felt ideal for a good ride. There were few cars on the road which helped me to settle into my chosen pace in top gear with legs going at a good, but comfortable, cadence.



Uphill to the end of the bike section.

I went round the two roundabouts looking, in my opinion, like a real cyclist and headed for the first compulsory stop which was at a set of traffic lights where we had to put a foot down for 2 seconds regardless of the colour of the lights. Actually, the lights were on red and I stopped for more than 2 seconds, again checking with the marshal before I set off down through the shop lined road to Matlock Baths. For the first time, I saw a cyclist ahead of me – someone to chase! It didn't take long to catch her up and overtake with a cheerful "morning!" as I passed (at least I hope she felt it was cheerful!). I didn't see anyone else for the next couple of miles and kept pushing even as I went downhill – every second counts (possibly!). Another compulsory stop at the Cromford junction completed, I turned down into the valley road knowing that this should be a fast section before the hills.



Past the photographers and watching that I didn't collide with the cyclists going out.

However, just a few minutes along the road, I met the end of a traffic jam and eased myself through nearly to the front where a lorry was across the road, obviously turning round, with car drivers berating him.

"There's a man collapsed and lying in the road up there" he shouted back "You can't get through"

Oh no! What to do? Should I stop and offer help or do something, or should I fight my way through and continue racing? I really didn't

know the correct response!

The lorry soon started back down the road, leaving the way clear for the cars to move slowly past the accident and we could see a cyclist lying in the road covered by a pink blanket and surrounded by a number of marshals, another cyclist crouched beside him.

"Will he be OK?" I shouted as I passed

"Yes. Ambulance on its way" a marshal shouted back.

So I continued. Rightly or wrongly, I was back in race mode.

I knew the hill didn't start until 5.3 miles, so made use of the empty countryside road to get some speed going. I felt really good although I had no one in sight to compare my progress against. I passed a couple of runners going for a country run and for once, didn't even think about swapping places!

All too soon I reached the end of the valley and turned eastwards and started up the hills. The first mile or so was fine. I was well prepared for it and having a couple of competitors come into view, gave me additional purpose to push harder. I must have passed 4 or 5 cyclists on this first hilly section and although as I got to flat bit just before the really steep section, two cyclists overtook me, I kept up with them as they moaned to each other about the hill querying how much further it went (lack of preparation there!) I caught up to one and after going a short distance on his back wheel, I overtook him as the other went zooming off into the distance.

It was about a mile of steady uphill to the main road and on a high, I passed a number of cyclists including a couple of young competitors cycling alongside parents but awesome nevertheless. The route took us past the Tansley Car Boot sale and several people shouted encouragement which bought a grin to my face! Once at the main road I knew I had basically made it and set off down the 3 mile steep hill to Matlock.



Steep hills down are SO hard for old knees!

Bearing in mind that 4 months ago, I couldn't go down our home road without my hands firmly braking the bike, I have made such progress and although my hands weren't far away from the brakes, I didn't touch them once on the way down and kept my body as low to the bike as I could. According to my Garmin, I reached 33mph – a new fastest speed for me!

I did get overtaken by a “real” cyclist on one of those thin wheeled road bikes. He didn't actually get very far ahead of me and I was only a little way behind him as we turned back into the Leisure Centre road – and then HE GOT OFF AND PUSHED!!! Maybe I *should* have done that, but to my way of thinking, the last place I would want anyone seeing me pushing is at the spectator area! So in bottom gear, I got to the top of the drive.

Transition 2

Actually, I have little memory of this transition as it was SO fast (only for a beginner probably!). My bike was taken from me as soon as I dismounted and I moved swiftly (not really running) to my box where I took off my helmet and glasses, spent a few seconds just trying to think whether there was anything

else I needed, did a couple of knee-up stretches, then off! Again I tried to grin at the photographers although I hadn't thought just how horrible my hair, squashed from wet under a cycle helmet, was going to look!

The Run: 8:15am

In some perverse way, I think the awful first experience I had in Germany of going from cycling to running, did me a lot of good as I don't believe it could ever be that bad again. Therefore, although I had some pins and needles in my feet and my legs were definitely not present (although my body was being held up by something at its usual height), I didn't feel as bad as I thought I would. Saying that, it was hard to get into the flow and probably took at least half a mile before I started to breath properly, but by which time I had already overtaken a few runners.

Someone with a good sense of humour had included a long and irregular flight of steps at about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile and the turn off the flat road was too steep to even begin running up them. Although I tried to resume running, the tightness in my calves (and the other "runners" walking up the steps ahead of me) quickly persuaded me that I could speed walk this section and start again at the top. Back on pace, the next bit followed along the back of houses before turning upwards through the housing estate to another narrow path. Again, I overtook a number of runners and felt that my hill runs had prepared me well for this. Once out of the housing estate, the route was across a playing field, down some



'Smile as you cross the finish line' the instructions had said!

large wood edged steps and around the edge of a field to the end of lap one.

At the top of this field were two signs; 'Finish' (with arrow pointing straight on) and '2nd Lap' (with arrow pointing to the left. Having previously looked at the map, I was aware that I needed to follow '2nd Lap' to the left. Not so the three runners ahead of me who had already done their 2nd lap! In spite of the marshal bellowing at them that they had gone the wrong way, they hared down the field again until they stopped at the bottom to question where the finish was.

"You've taken the wrong turn" I said as I caught up with them.

“F***!” one of them shouted, only to be backed up by the others who both seemed to think it was the marshal’s fault.

“Where do we go then?” one of them asked me (we were still running – at my pace – at this point)

“You’d do best to go to the end of this path and turn right back up to the finish”, I replied. Which is what they did, continuing to apportion blame on the marshal throughout. How bizarre!

A steep concrete path led back to the main road where several spectators were shouting their final encouragements. I really dislike that sort of downhill and the discomfort shows in the awful photograph taken as I descended.

Just a mile and a bit to go. A second wind – or maybe the thought of the finish in sight – spurred me on and I overtook a few more runners as the second lap disappeared behind me. It was strange not knowing whether the runner in front of you is doing the same lap or is still one lap behind and also no knowledge of when they started the race. In some way this took away some of the competitive edge and although I did chase, I am also aware that I pulled back somewhat from a young lad and his parent who were desperately trying to hold me off. I know I would never have done that in a “normal” race!

Round the top corner, along the straight and to the finish. A smile for the photographer (as instructed!) and Garmin stopped.
1 hour, 28 minutes and 46 seconds.

I am a triathlete!

Afterthoughts

I loved the event – once it had started – and the support from family, friends and event volunteers was magnificent. I now enjoy cycling and swimming far more than before and can see that I will be able to expand my training to include these as regular occurrences.



It felt so good to finish!

I’m less sure about taking on more triathlon challenges. It was strange to finish and not know how well you had done compared with others, although maybe that comes with knowledge of previous times and results from other events. Some competitors were still waiting to

start when I had finished which again alters the euphoria of finishing as I felt I needed to be aware of the nerves of those waiting.

Training for it was fun, particularly working on my swimming. I think I saw that as a real challenge and the background reading I have done on swimming and how to improve, has really opened my eyes to the reality of the skills and ability of swimmers. I don't yet think that I am 'racing' as much as 'riding' my bike. I know I have improved massively in confidence – the hands off brakes going downhill is evidence of the success of that – but I'm not sure how I match up with racing. Again it's unfortunate that no split times were recorded – except those done by competitors themselves – so it's difficult to do any comparison and I am aware that I really thrive on the competitive edge of comparing my performance with others. Maybe a triathlon with splits timed and published is what I need!

Running as a smaller proportion of a competition was very new and although I believe that my performance on this section was fairly good, there were times particularly when it was hard going, that I thought about the fact that the three activities were combined in the final time, so no one would know if I went slower!! How inexplicable that I should even think that in a race – so unlike me!

However, when the results were published and I discovered that I had won the prize for the fastest novice woman, I admit to being immensely proud. 59 women competed and finished and I was 27th. Not bad for a first try.

Will I do another one? Yes probably. I don't feel the urge to sign up immediately, as I did after the marathon, but I enjoyed it - particularly as a member of the Smiley Paces and know I will want to be part of one again.

Possibly next year....

