

## Dave Nickolls' Challenge Barcelona Half Iron Man Race report

Thought I better get around to doing my Challenge Barcelona Half Iron Man Race report whilst it's still fresh in my mind.

I arrived in Calella Nr Barcelona on the Thursday before the race on Sunday. The previous weeks had been made up of a fairly controlled panic about what I'd let myself in for and the usual "Have I trained enough for this?" "Is It too far too soon?" and other doom mongering scenarios, I had done a lot of training but was it enough? My best way of dealing with it seemed to be in retail therapy, trying to buy fitness and speed from Mammoth lifestyle It helps but it's no substitute for hard work.

I walked into the hotel expecting to see Triathletes milling around but I was greeted by what looked like an old people's home, Two coach loads of old grannies on their yearly Costa del sol Holibobs! The next morning they had all gone and the hotel started filling up with Triathletes from all over Europe this was a bit more like it! The hotel Volga is a great place perfect for this event, right next to the start line and Expo. Later that morning I went over and signed up for the race, It was very different from any other race I'd ever done they gave me my race numbers for my bike, helmet and my main numbers for my race belt I was impressed by the main numbers as it had 1339 David (GBR) Cool I'm racing for Great Britton!!

They gave me three bags for the transitions a Bike bag, a Run bag and a Street wear bag all of which had my numbers on, I also got a very nice little ruck sack with Challenge Barcelona 2009 on it this was full of goodies and a magazine with all the race details in it. It was all very professional in fact the whole event was huge and really well organised.

Even more super fit people milling around, I was starting to get more concerned that I'm going to come last, that's if I make it around at all! I had a look around the Expo to see if anyone had any more fitness for sale but to no avail.

I thought I would go for a ride, I built up my bike which I was glad to say went together first time and it hadn't been damaged in transit. Thanks Dawn for the loan of the bike case and Gary for the loan of the Disk wheel bag. There roads where fantastic not a pot hole to be seen just nice smooth tarmac. It's like another world compared to our roads. There were a few more hills than had been advertised but nothing too bad, It felt good to be riding down the coast road in the sun. The bike leg was never my main concern I know I can do a half marathon but after the swim and the bike was new territory.

Back from the ride, I thought I better tackle my main concern, the 1.9 km Sea swim I got back to the hotel and a big group of French people where all gathering with their wet suits ready to go for a swim so I tagged along with them as I didn't fancy swimming in the sea on my own. I put my wet suit on and looked out to sea it was rough and the thought of a 1.9 km swim in that seemed beyond me. We all got in the sea in a group they were also concerned about the waves, I suppose that made me feel better in a way not all of these super fit looking people were racing machines! To my surprise it was fine the wet suit and the salt water made me float and the waves were ok as soon as you got used to the bobbing around avoiding getting a gob full of sea water was high on my list of priorities. If anything the waves were a bit of a leveller I was keeping up with the French swimmers without any problem.

After the bike ride and the swim I started to feel happy about the race and remembered what Nick said "Soak it all up" after all how often do you get to do your first Half Iron Man Race! I was enjoying the atmosphere it seemed like to whole town was either doing the race or had something to do with it. It's like the buzz you get in the hours before a local triathlon but it lasts for three days.

The day before the race was the race brief and bike and bag racking, I took my bike to its number on the racks I've never seen such a big transition area thousands of bikes all in rows at the top of the beach gleaming in the sun. very impressive. To my surprise everyone was letting their tyres down, this was a completely new one on me I eventually found someone who spoke English who told me it was something to do with the heat and the pressure of the tyres that makes them go pop. I didn't want to risk it so I followed suit, I quite often think if I missed this triathlon lark then at nearly every race I learn something new! After that I hanged my bags on the pegs, I like this bag idea at least you know you have got everything when your bag is empty, that's as long as you have packed them properly.

So that was it, one more sleep until the race I had been preparing for since the summer of 2008, I had dinner and went to bed. I slept quite well which I wasn't expecting, I got up went and pumped up my tyres then down to the beach and the start line. The sea was even rougher today but after my swim before I wasn't worried. I was surprised to see and talk to lots of people who seemed to be very worried about the whole thing telling me it was their first time at this distance and generally talking gibberish. Where had all these people been hiding these people were miles more worried than I was I was glad I had got all my panicking out of the way a few days ago. "Is it wrong to find comfort in other peoples despair!?" If you like me find it comforting make your way to the back of the starting grid there are far too many alpha males at the front they won't give you any comforting gibberish!

The race Started in four waves of about 600 people I was in the third wave in the blue hats. The race started and it was a mass of White water It didn't worry me like I thought it would it looked brilliant a few minutes later my race started, it was a run into the surf people everywhere trying to get through the first few breakers but once I went through them I went with my plan of keeping to the right hand side of the pack and just slog it out. the markers were nowhere to be seen, even if I stopped and tread water and waited until I was on top of a wave I couldn't see them so I just followed the long line of white water. This worked fine until the last marker I followed the pack off course about 200 meters before a canoeist shepherded us back, the Swim could have done with some more canoeists the ones I saw had people hanging off them being sick I must have seen at least five people being sick or coiffing up water.

I got out of the water in my usual style swerving around like a drunk man. Luckily it doesn't last long and I found my way to the bags then into the change tent, this was a huge tent full of benches, you get changed into your bike gear then put your wet suit into the run bag then go they sort your bag out for you. The bike course was great apart from a few hills it was nice and flat for about 20 miles then you take a right turn into the mountains its quite a long drag up but it was soon over the downhill was a nice break then it was out a bit further then turn around and head back to Calella as soon as the turnaround came the ride became hard work straight into a head wind that's when one of my pet hates started; people drafting everywhere huge packs of them it was like the tour de France the packs would swallow you up and spit you out the back I had to slow down to let them past I didn't want to be disqualified for drafting, 250 people did and that wasn't enough in my opinion.

After three hours I finished the bike leg and the bit I was dreading came, as soon as I stopped the bike it got hot, the sun was beating down and it was around 27 degrees with no shade, I started running and it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be, I stuck to my plan of walking through every feed station I would take a gel drink a glass of water then pour two over my head. This worked perfectly along with the beach shows and the guy in the beach bar with the hose pipe very refreshing! The last part of the run was the best bit I had to turn off the beach into the town, in each

street in the town there was more and more people cheering you on, at the very end was a really steep hill which was packed full of people all cheering and giving high fives, it was brilliant fun then it was a left turn into a big sports stadium and the Finnish line.

6 hours 24 not the fastest time ever but I was a long way from being last the main aim of the day was to Finnish which I did and I felt surprisingly fresh I know I could have knocked off 10 minutes off the swim if I hadn't gone off course and it wasn't so rough I could have gone faster on the bike and the run if I had known how fresh I was going to feel at the end but I'm happy with my time and can quite honestly say I enjoyed every minute of it. The only thing about feeling so good at the end is now I've got the idea in my head that I could do a full iron man, Not sure if it will be next year or the year after but it's in my head now so I'll have to do one sooner or later!



