

Two Days, Two Tris

By: Mone' Haen

The Donner Triathlon Events take place over two days in July with a Sprint distance triathlon, Open Water Swims and Kids triathlons taking place on Saturday; and the Olympic and Half Ironman distance triathlons and Aquabike events taking place on Sunday. This year, I had the pleasure of competing in two of those events - the Sprint and Olympic distance triathlons.

While I've competed in the Sprint every year since 2014, 2017 was my first time participating in the Olympic distance as well. How did this come about? Well, in the midst of Snowmageddon 2016/2017, when we had 10 foot snow berms in front of our house, no power and a house full of kids who hadn't been to school in about a month, my friend Cortney and I got to drinking some wine.

Shocking, truly shocking – I know.

Long story, short, I peer pressured her and her husband, Jeff into signing up for the Donner Lake Tri. I either didn't specify which distance, or she decided to raise my peer pressure bet; thus she signed up for the Olympic Distance. I am a sucker for peer pressure so upon hearing that she signed up for the Olympic, I decided to followed suit.

The prolonged winter made training interesting to say the least. Running in snow and ice turned into running in slush and mud turned into running on dirt. Throw in a few "real" road rides, lots of towing my daughter on our tandem attachment, a decent amount of swimming at the [Truckee Rec Center](#) and a few open water swim sessions at [West End Beach](#) and voila -Tri Training Truckee Mom style.

Fast forward to event days...

Sprint Triathlon – Saturday July 22, 2017

The [Donner Lake Sprint course](#) is comprised of a ¼ mile swim, followed by a 6 mile ride and a 2 mile run. This race has become one of my "benchmark" races. By that, I mean that I participate in the race every year and try to improve upon my performance from the year before. I love this race, because it's short, but challenging and it's in my back yard, figuratively speaking.



Arriving on the scene the morning of the race, with my gear and bike in tow, I was greeted by lovely volunteers ready to adorn me with a Sharpie. Although the body marking really isn't necessary anymore due to timing chips, I love that this tradition carries on – my bib number on my arm and my age on my calf somehow makes it feel all the more fun and exciting. The body-marking ritual complete, I proceeded into the transition area and began the process of racking my bike and laying out my gear.



The energy and excitement was palpable from the athletes and spectators and I found that adrenaline was starting to pump through my veins in anticipation. It was only 6:30am and my wave wasn't going to start for over an hour. In order to calm nerves and stop my adrenaline from wearing off before the race even started, I put my hoodie on, put my earbuds in and tuned out of the surrounding activity.

Under cloak and headphone, I walked over to the water's edge to get a bit of quiet and take in the scenery. I'm a Truckee local so I'm spoiled in that I enjoy these views on a regular basis, but I'm still in awe each and every time I swim, ride or run in or around Donner Lake. The scenery couldn't be more beautiful. The lake is surrounded by granite and pine, and this time of morning, the water was glassy.



Just before the 7:30am race start, the transition area was cleared and we all made our way to the shoreline in anticipation of the race start. Right on time, men 49 & under were sent into the water. Ten minutes later, my race began amongst fellow women in wetsuits and pink swim caps.

The water temperature is right around the same as the air temperature, if not a little warmer, at this time of day, so the swim is really pleasant and it's not a shock to the system. In a quarter mile, it's not really possible to "settle in", but unlike previous years, I found my groove in the water right away and swam the course in 7:48.

Exiting the water, I hustled into the transition area, peeled off my wetsuit and cap and cleaned the pine needles and sand off my feet as best as I could. Bike shoes – check, helmet – check, sunglasses- check (for me this isn't a luxury – they're prescription)..... go. I never run out of this transition area to the bike course. It's too far on loose sand and I'd rather conserve the energy for the ride, so I trot out of the transition area and mount my bike on Old 40 aka Donner Pass Road.

Upon starting the bike course, there's a very short runway before the climbing starts – about a tenth of a mile. Then it starts - the long climb up to Rainbow Bridge. The course description sounds easy – a 6 mile bike ride? Piece of cake! Nope. It's an out and back and there's a thousand feet of elevation gain, so yes – that's a thousand feet of climbing in less than 3 miles. Pedaling up the roughly 7% grade at about 6-8 miles per hour allowed me to look around at the beautiful scenery surrounding Old 40. There were towering granite cliffs in all directions and old retired train tunnels to southwest. The climb is rewarded once again at the turnaround at Rainbow Bridge with early morning views of Donner Lake below.





The climb over, I turned my focus entirely to the descent down Old 40. I'm a chicken on the downhill and going 30+ miles per hour (note that some athletes achieve speeds well in excess of 40-45 miles per hour) is pretty intimidating to me, not to mention that the visual basically gives the optical illusion of riding off a cliff at times. Nonetheless, I got into by drops with a light touch on my brakes and started silently chanting my own little mantra of "stay off the brakes, trust the bike, go fast". Well, that worked great and I was feeling pretty confident until I hit a small pot hole about a third of the way down. It was really nothing, but it scared the shit out of me and I slowed my pace a bit after that. All in all, the climb up to me about 25 minutes and the descent took me about 7 minutes. So yeah, I got a 7 minute rest before the foot-down stop at the bottom of Old 40 followed by the dismount and run into transition.

After a quick change of shoes I ran out of transition and headed out on South Shore Drive. The run course is a 2 mile out and back and is largely flat, but has a bit of a climb (about 80 feet total) between the half mile mark and the turnaround. The road is flanked by adorable, old family cabins and crosses two quaint bridges with rushing water beneath. Having run the course before and knowing what was in store, I knew it was time to push hard and use the legs I conserved on the climb up Old 40. I ended up running the 2 miles in just under 16 minutes for a final time of 59:58 and a 2nd place age group finish. It was over of my goal time of 57 minutes but 4 minutes faster than I had completed the Sprint before – a new benchmark set.

While my endorphins started pumping as soon as I got in the water at the start of the race, they really surged after crossing the finish line. I was ecstatic. It had absolutely nothing to do with my time or where I placed amongst my peers, it was simply a chemical reaction to the physical exertion and the energy surrounding the event.

To top it all off, I got to watch my six year old daughter, Sawyer participate in the kids race. There is nothing cuter than a bunch of tiny humans racing around a tri course. Sawyer ended up winning her race and having a blast every second of the way.



Olympic Triathlon – Sunday July 23, 2017

The [Donner Lake Olympic course](#) is comprised of a 1500 meter swim, followed by a 24.8 mile ride and a 6.5 mile run. While I've completed this distance before, this was my first year racing on this course. Still, I pretty much knew what to expect from my experiences with the Sprint and having the area as my training ground.

The morning of the race, at about 2:00am, I woke up with my stomach in knots. I'm not sure if it was a touch of food poisoning or what, but let's just say I didn't get much sleep after that. If I hadn't committed to doing to race with my friend, Cortney, I would have thrown in the towel and gone back to bed. I couldn't flake on her though so I forced down some oatmeal, drank a lot of water, pulled my big girl tri shorts on and headed out to West End Beach.

Given my digestive "issues", I was actually concerned that I wouldn't even be able to start the race much less finish it. I resolved to just give it a go and see how it went. Gradually my body started to settle down and by some minor miracle; I actually started to feel pretty good. In spite of that I knew the stomach issues and lack of sleep had taken a toll on my energy level so at that point I just resolved to

take it easy and cruise for whatever portion of the race I could. Ironically, having this mindset resulted in an unbelievably calm start to the race. No race jitters, no adrenaline, no expectations. It was oddly Zen.

My wave started at 7:55AM and I literally walked, very calmly into the water. No running or diving in. I walked in, and slowly started swimming out to the first buoy. I grew up swimming competitively from the age of 7 to 16 so my form isn't terrible. I knew I swam more efficiently when I was relaxed but I had no idea how efficiently until this point. I somehow managed to get out of the school of swimmers and find my own little pocket of water. The swim was literally blissful. My breathing and nerves were calm, my body was at ease and I was enjoying the swim more than I thought possible. Rounding the second buoy and heading back to the shore, I picked up pace a bit but not much. I still maintained a calm and relaxed stroke. I ended up finishing the swim at an average pace of 1:51/100yd. By way of comparison, my swim time for the Sprint was an average pace of 1:42/100yd and I was gunning for it on that course. So, lesson learned – RELAX.

I've participated in endurance sports long enough to know that my body can revolt if I don't listen to it. So although I felt amazing after the swim, I walked into transition and calmly got ready for the bike. No rushing, no adrenaline, just calm focus. I walked out of transition and mounted my bike to begin the same climb up Old 40 that I had completed as part of the Sprint the day before.

I ascended Old 40 at a conservative pace and kept my heart rate hovering around 120-130 bpm, still not wanting to risk a bodily revolt. The same granite cliffs were no less inspiring and breathtaking (or maybe that was just the climb). Anyway, I caught up with Cortney at the summit and we proceeded to ride and gab and ride and gab and sing until we happened upon another rider who had clearly collided with something. There were plenty of people already at her aid and we didn't have any means of providing assistance or even calling for help so we resolved to get out of the way. We later found out that she had hit a deer going about 45 miles per hour. I have often had to avoid hitting a squirrel or a chipmunk while riding, but never thought of the possibility of hitting a deer.

A bit sobered from seeing the aftermath of a bike/deer collision, we proceeded to the turn around and then made our way back up to the summit. Happily, we discovered that the injured cyclist was being attended to by the Fire Department when we passed back by her and she appeared to be sitting unaided.

As we approached the summit, I pulled a bit ahead of Cortney, but then as we began the descent down Old 40, she blew past me like I was standing still. This was the same woman that was terrified of riding Old 40 a mere 3 days before. After that, I didn't even see her until the transition area!!!

After my extremely focused descent, I took a head to toe assessment of how I was feeling. Shockingly, I felt great. Really great! I remember thinking "how the hell is this happening? Well, whatever, go with it." I got into transition, re-racked my bike and got my running shoes on. At this point I decided to push it. I felt good and had a ton of energy from taking the first two legs of the tri easy. If I blew up, oh well.

Running out of transition and onto course, I got giddy - endorphin high, slightly spazzy - giddy. I still have absolutely no explanation for any of it and it still doesn't make sense that my body somehow managed to recover from the wrenching stomach issues I had, but I ran with it. Pun intended.

I'll admit it; it's immensely satisfying to pick off runners one by one that passed me on the ride. I kept a fairly fast pace (for me anyway) all the way around the lake and was encouraged and fueled with each successful passing of a mile. The giddiness only increased as I got closer to the finish and when I hit the one mile to finish mark I was ecstatic!

I rounded the corner into the West End parking lot and heard my daughter, husband and friends cheering as I ran onto the lawn approaching the finish. I heard my daughter yell "ENGAGE TURBO BOOSTERS!" and turned the wheels on for a sprint finish. It was good enough for a 3rd place age group finish.

I had zero expectations going into the day and ended up having the most incredible and satisfying racing experiences of my life.

****Thanks to Todd, Bryan, Misty and all of the wonderful volunteers at Big Blue Adventure for putting on a phenomenal weekend long triathlon festival!****