

Try a tri

Shortly after moving to Texas, I made a promise to myself that within a year,



I would complete a triathlon. After all, I could run, I owned a bike and although I couldn't actually swim a lap of the crawl (freestyle) without gasping for air, I understood the basic principles behind swimming.

In preparation I signed up for swimming lessons at the Keller Natatorium in August. Thanks to my patient, 20-year-old coach, Wes, I built up my endurance and was soon able to swim 60 lengths non-stop although my flip turns still left much to be desired. I didn't specifically train for the bike portion of the race, mistakenly believing that my daily 10-minute commute to the pool or grocery store on my 30-pound Peugeot counted as 'time on the bike.'

By late September, I had still not crossed Triathlon off my to-do list. This was partly because I was having too much fun racing every weekend, but also because a triathlon still seemed like a huge leap into the unknown. The words, transition zone, brick, false flat had been added to my vocabulary, but the whole event still seemed so complicated. One morning, I found a leaflet stuck to my car windshield promoting a reverse triathlon in Keller on October 22. I kept the leaflet ``just in case.'' A week later, as a birthday gift, my sister paid my entry fee for the event, assuring me it would be a great experience.

Once I had received my registration confirmation there was no turning back and it was time to figure out details, like where to purchase my one-day license, when to have my bike inspected, what to do if I crashed, etc, etc. To ease my mind, I decided to cycle the bike course, calculating that 12 miles shouldn't take me much longer than 40 minutes. 40 minutes passed, 50 minutes and I was still nowhere near home. An hour later, I arrived back at the Keller Natatorium, deflated and confused. Admittedly, I hadn't changed gears once, and the course was fairly hilly and it was actually 13 miles and not 12.

However, the reality was I was SLOW. My Peugeot was by no means a racing bike. I might as well ride a grand piano -- at least then I could have music helping me up those hills.

Rooting around in the garage, I found a lighter bike belonging to my husband.

While it was clearly too large for me, a visit to the local bike shop ensured that I was at least able to sit down without too much pain. I cycled the course once again. It was easier this time, although I felt as though I were riding a tandem bike from the rear seat. In panic, I e-mailed the race director to ask what their policy was regarding cancellations.

It was quite simple: no refunds! Reluctant to throw away \$60, I decided

to go ahead with my long bike. At least it was better than a grand piano. On race morning, I arrived at the Natatorium at 6 a.m as the event staff was setting up.

I quickly established where to place my bike, where to enter and exit the transition zone, what to wear and what not to wear. Before I knew it, we were all lined up; runners, duathletes and triathletes. And then we were off.

As it was a reverse tri, the event started with the run portion -- familiar territory.

Finishing in first place out of the women triathletes, I felt I was off to a good start. However, a couple of miles into the bike course, people of all shapes and sizes started to pass me effortlessly -- old people, young people, fat, thin ... I swear I even saw Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz with Toto in tow. At one point, as I was switching gears, there was a horrible, crunching noise that seemed to go on forever. Convinced my chain had fallen off or broken, I jumped off to check it out, knowing that if anything had happened, I would be ditching my bike and jogging the rest of the course. Everything looked fine, so I climbed back on, massaged the gears a little and continued on my way. My hands were now freezing as my woolly gloves had become wet from the water dripping from my camel pack, which it turns out I didn't really need anyway. Once I'd completed the bike ride, I stripped off and jumped into the pool. After only a couple of strokes, I felt breathless. It was as if I'd forgotten how to swim. To make matters worse, my hair tie snapped and my hair was now all over my face, in front of my eyes, in my mouth!

As I flailed around trying to retrieve my hair tie and gasping like a fish out of water, I worried that the concerned lifeguards might try to fish me out. I decided to continue with the breast stroke. To my surprise, I even passed a few people and crossed the finish line in 1-hour and 30 minutes - 17th woman overall and 3rd in my age group. However, I couldn't help wondering how I would have done with some specific training. I guess I'll have to tri again...