

A day with Deca Ironman Ger

26th May 2018

This isn't a race report as such, more an extract (a long one!!!) from my own Ironman training journal, of a day which included a "training triathlon" as well as being a day of learning and motivation. So much so that I wanted to share my experience with fellow ATC members and friends.



A bit of background to set the scene. A couple of months ago I got in touch with a guy who is quite frankly a legend within the long distance triathlon & endurance event circuit. Ger Prendergast, winner of the 2017 Deca UK (that's 10 Ironman in 10 days). A remarkable achievement (follow this link to read more on [Deca UK winner](#)) and one anybody could retire on. Ger however has gone on this year to take on (in my eyes) the even bigger challenge of completing [52 Ironman in 52 weeks](#). Most of them solo efforts, aside from the support and company he get from friends & family. This particular challenge being done to raise awareness and funds for Mental Health Ireland. A charity he and I feel strongly about and one Athy Triathlon Club are also supporting this year through our ATC Ironman Barca fundraising campaign (further details on that can be found here [ATC Ironman Barca 2018](#)).

Anyway, after a few rounds of instant messages (where I tried to introduce myself without coming across like a stalker or schoolgirl corresponding with her latest pop idol) we agreed I'd join him for part of his **Friday Ironman day** to talk all things triathlon and enjoy a day off work in the sun.

The plan was to meet up at the National Aquatic Centre for a 6am swim, the venue for most of Ger's Friday Ironman swims. That in itself was appealing as I'd never swam in a 50m pool before. We'd use the NAC as our base/transition and figure out a suitable bike route. Suitable for my limited ability that is, Ger obviously bangs out 180km on a weekly basis. Ideally I'd manage 120-150k on the bike, looping back to the NAC every couple of hours for gear check, refuel etc. Ger would finish his bike back in Ballymun where he lives & head to the local Trinity Comprehensive School grounds, where he usually completes the 42k marathon section of his weekly Ironman. I know, you keep saying it but it doesn't get any less impressive. An ironman every week!!! For little old me, I'd have put in a very decent Swim/Bike brick to keep the training progression going as well as pick up some tips from this plant based fuelled Ultra Triathlon machine! I know!!!! the lad doesn't touch Cliff bars, or gels or jelly beans or blocs or any of that sh1t. Veggies, fruits, nuts & coconut milk, fit as a fiddle and powered up enough to win a non stop DECA IRONMAN in 158hrs. I had to find out more about this clean diet and how it could possibly fuel him through such mind boggling endurance event challenges.

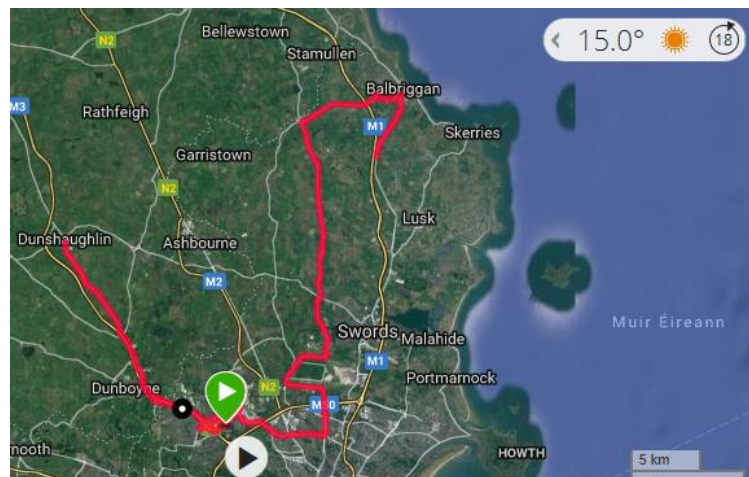
I'm trying to sound all cool and relaxed about this but truth be told I was really excited about this day. I barely slept the night before, going over logistics in my head (like it was an actual race day!!!) so when the 4:30am alarm went off, I'd been awake for a good hour waiting for it.

After a hearty healthy breakfast I was away in the car to The Big Schmoke. Parking up right outside the doors of the NAC for 5:45am, and got about checking the gear, rehearsing my opening conversation (ref: schoolgirl meets Beiber!!!) and G-ing myself up for a good long training day. Unsurprisingly Ger was bang on time, and after a quick intro it was down to business. The NAC is some venue. A massive place, countless lanes most of which were reserved for the onsite swim team, but there was plenty of space for Joe Publics with lanes marked for various abilities/speeds. I didn't wanna look like too much of a muppet so I opted for the "medium speed" lane and shortly after 6am we kicked off.

The plan was to do the full Ironman swim. People balk at the distance but lets be honest, in a nicely warmed (clean/clear water) pool where you can see/touch the bottom, where roped lanes make it impossible to swim more than the required number of lengths, where you can use swim aids (if you so wish), where you have little or no overcrowding, no time pressure, where you get a break and a push off the wall every 50m and as Ger put it "we're in no rush & it's just up and down 38 times" it's really not all that daunting. After a bit of an adrenaline fuelled quick start, I relaxed, got into a rythme, tried to focus on my (sh1t) form and let the Garmin do the counting. When stronger swimmers crept up on me, I just held back at the wall for a few seconds and let them pass (not all swimmers had the same pool etiquette on the day which was a bit annoying) but it didn't really matter, once I didn't leave Ger waiting too long at the end I'd be happy enough. That said, I wanted to do it without too many breaks and at my planned Ironman pace, and apart from the traffic stops, the odd goggle adjustment and quick change of lanes, when the initial one got a bit busy, it was job done in 1hr 21mins.

Ger as expected had finished well before me, but after a quick dry off and check of the phone, the message was there to meet in the carpark when ready. Again, no rushing, this wasn't a race against anyone or even the clock. We got the bikes out of the cars and after a quick route reccy we headed off for a planned 3 or so hour loop. Now, this is where the biggest challenge of the day for me came. For the first 15km we stuttered our way through Finglas, Ballymun & St. Margrets. Some busy roads with dodgy surfaces, loads of traffic lights and a few dodgy drivers, some with plenty to say for themselves!! We really don't know how lucky we are down in the Schticks, with so many quiet safe roads to cycle on. Just as we started to see some green and get some space on the road out by the airport, at 13km I heard the sound I dread

most on the bike, the hissing and clumping of a flat tyre, the back one at that!!! The first puncture I'd had on the TT bike since I bought it in 2016. 13km into my day with The Deca Dude and I was about to be found out for the cycling sap that I am. Thankfully Ger was as decent as our own bike masters Kavanagh & Rowan and aided me through my fumbling attempts to repair the damage and away we went. As we headed out through Roganstown,



Ballyboughal, Naul, Balbriggan I took the opportunity to chat to Ger, ask him a few questions about his triathlon and endurance event exploits. I'd done my homework and was familiar with his background so knew what I wanted to ask. Ger is a quiet spoken lad, very humble but really friendly and willing to chat and answer any questions I posed. The day was turning out to be a cracker, the sun was out, the pace was comfortable, lovely green fields all calm and relaxed till Ger, who lead the way throughout the day, pulled in quite suddenly. He'd only gone and been headbutted by a suicide bee!!! Stung right in the face. We pulled in for a quick medical check but cracked on quickly enough. We'd just about shaken off my puncture anxiety and Ger's head to head with the kamakazee bee when bang, at 50km it was Ger's turn for the puncture. I got the blame of course for being a jinx, but without even flinching, bish bosh, the tyre was replace and away we went. At this stage neither of us had another tube so we turned just after Balrothery and headed back the way we came. Returning to the NAC just shy of 100km done. After a good leg stretch and refuel, we headed out the opposite direction, through Clonee and on out to Dunshaughlin on the Navan road for a 20km out and back route that offered us much more comfortable cycling surfaces. It was a good call as the additional road room offered me



the chance to cycle up with Ger and bend his ear some more. Talk of strategies for Back to Back Ironman, Tripples, Quads, Deca's. Ironman Lanza, Ironman Wales, The Race in Donegal, Ballymun 100mile run !! Jazuz his CV is phenomenal. When he finally mentioned he planned to give **The Kerry Hardman** a go this year I nearly p1ssed myself with excitement at the chance of offering up some race info or route knowledge to him!!! Internal monologue went "YES" at that moment. After that of course it was straight back to me being the student in awe of the Tri teacher but it was a nice moment for me none the less!!!!

Anyway, back to the biking (no Maggie, we are not on a tandem bike in the above photo!!), despite some roadworks the 2nd half of the IRON BIKE was a nicer route. After battling the headwinds out to Dunshaughlin, we zipped back to (my hometown) Blanchardstown with the wind at our backs to make the 140km checkpoint in decent time. At this point Ger headed off on a final loop towards Ballymun to finish his 180km before setting off on his run from home to Trinity Comprehensive School (he'd pick up his car at the NAC that night/next day). Because the last 40km were kind enough, after a leg stretch & feed I felt relatively ok so decided to do a 2nd lap out to Dunshaughlin and back to bring my own cycle up to the full ironman 180km. Cycle time (excluding puncture pitstops etc.) was 7hrs 20mins, with a nice mix of zone 2-4 intervals. **Full Ironman swim and bike in the bag by 4pm or so. Beats the hell out of working of a Friday that's for sure.**

Ger had been great company throughout the day and with an invitation to join him in Ballymun at 5pm for a run, I decided jogging “a few laps” was a better option than sitting on the M50 & N7 in peak hour traffic so I headed out to suss out the scene of his weekly marathon.

The run route is very simply 500m laps of the school ground. Now, some may balk at the idea of such short loops but I found it to be absolutely brilliant. Every 3 minutes you tick another box, stop for a drink or food. Ger’s sister supports his run every week by setting out a table with water, electrolytes & a variety of fruit. She does a few laps herself too, brilliant family support and participation. He usually gets a few of his bootcamp clients or local runners joining him.

I started off myself with a few laps and Ger joined me soon after 5pm - having done about 10 miles already from his house to the school. For the next 90mins we tipped away together, keeping a nice easy conversation paced and converse we did. This time about his work in the community, at the school, his gym ‘**J.r. Bootcamp**’ which is on the school grounds. About the local community support he gets. About the recent Ballymun running festival where hundreds of people took part in running these very laps to make up distances from 5k to 100 miles (yes, that’s right, 100 miles/160km in 500m laps!!!!). Physically challenging? For sure, mentally challenging? – Hell yes. Ger and his mate completed the 100 miles (this was inbetween his weekly Ironman days!). So we ran and chatted some more, all the while Ger encouraging and sharing information and advise. We talked about him hopefully finding a free evening to take a trip down to Athy to give a presentation/talk to **Athy Tri Club** members. Plans are even afoot for our club to host one of his Ironman days. That’s right **IRONMAN ATHY COMING SOON !!!**

We chatted about growing up in the local community, he explained to me how at the age of 8 he permanently lost the sight in his left eye. I’d wondered why he’d always taken up a position to my left on the bike and run, he explained cause if I’d been on the other side he’d have probably mowed me down!!!! He told me about how next week he’s heading to the venue of The Celtic Warrior to do a (continuous) Tripple Ironman as part of his training for a Quad/Quint Ironman on the August bank holiday. I will be joining him that weekend at some stage too for another good long days Tri-ing. I think there’s a good crew of ATC members planning the same.

As we ran, anyone that passed us knew him, and it’s easy to see why he’s so popular in Ballymun. He’s a local celeb, one lad shouted out at him from the gym window “Ah there goes Nicky Byrne’s mate” a reference to his recent radio interview to publicise his fundraising campaign [everyday hero page: 52-ironman-triathlons-in-52-weeks-2018](#). I’ve shared it on our club Facebook page, as well as my own, but happy to share it here again as it is such a worthy cause and the challenge he is undertaking deserves peoples attention and support. I’d encourage everyone to check out his facebook page too: [Deca Ironman Ger](#). I pulled the plug on my own run at 15km, happy with my efforts, the longest single session I’ve done in months:

	25 May 2018	★	Deca Ger IM day RUNNING	15.05 km DISTANCE	1:31:04 TIME
	25 May 2018	★	Deca Ger IM day CYCLING	180.87 km DISTANCE	7:19:16 TIME
	25 May 2018	★	Deca Ger IM day LAP SWIMMING	3,800 m DISTANCE	1:21:28 TIME

The day for me was about more than training though. Yes, I got to spend some time with a triathlon legend, I asked about his experiences, listening and learning from someone who's been there and done that (times 100!). But it was also about being in the company of someone I admire not only as an endurance athlete, but as a campaigner for Mental Health, as a positive rolemodel within his local community & thanks to social media to an ever growing base of supporters/followers.

Ger is a normal guy, just like me, like my friends, like most of us. He has a busy family and work life, he has had to face obstacles and overcome adversity throughout his life, just like all of us. But he has not allowed that adversity to hold him back, if anything it's driven him on to do great things. Let's be honest, amazing things. But is it also my opinion that every single one of us has the potential to do amazing things, and with Ger telling me so, I believe it even more about myself. I am more motivated to reach my personal goals than ever as a result of our day.

It was a pleasure to spend time with him and I very much look forward to joining him on his weekly ironman quest again soon. If any of you get the opportunity to meet, speak or train with Ger I'd highly recommend it, hell, I'll even set it up. I could be a Celebrity's Agent, COOOOL!!!!!!

