



You might want to stick on the kettle.. it's a long one

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Before I start into how race day panned out, I just want to say a massive thanks to Ed, all my family (especially my three beautiful boys who, as young as they are, were amazingly patient with not having mammy around as much as I should have been - they even made me a trophy for when I got back, made of squishy toys stuck together) and friends who supported me through all the long hours/days/weeks/months- there is NO way I could do this without you all.

A special shout out to Eamonn who made this happen. I think I speak for every single one of us, who he took along for the ride, when I say that he has been an absolute legend and rock for us. He has totally inspired, encouraged, calmed and has basically been the big brother of the group. I know, personally, I totally took advantage of his selflessness and bombarded him with questions and meltdowns and I'm pretty sure I wasn't the only one.

Each and every one of you have all been amazing with your support and encouragement, even when I've been a grumpy, fed up, tired, moany fool.
You guys all deserve a medal too.

And to all of Athy Triathlon Club, especially those who came out to support us on Sunday in HORRENDOUS conditions and staying to the bitter end to bring us all across the line. The support from all of ATC, partners, families and friends was unbelievably epic and absolutely made the day so, so special. You'll never understand how much it meant to each and every one of us. You lot are legends and I'm so proud to call you all friends.



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RACE REPORT:

The day actually started during the VERY early hours when I was woken by cracking thunder and a lightning show.

Oh no.. this was not a good start.

I didn't look at the time but just tried to go back to sleep and hope that when I woke again that it'd be calmer.

Alarm went off at 5am.

Started getting ready. Gear on and I went out to the balcony to see how the day was looking and try calm the nerves. My heart was racing, I was terrified and the weather was looking awful... wet, windy. This was not going to be easy.

Breakfast in the hotel was early - 6am - catering for participants.

Place was full of triathletes and their support crew. Everyone looked so fit - what the hell was I doing there?!

The place was buzzing. You could tell by faces that nerves were kicking in! I'm guessing the weather really threw some people.

Breakfast eaten, we congregated in the hotel lobby and headed off down to transition to do the last minute bits of prep before we dipped our feet into the Mediterranean.

Ed had arrived at hotel around 11.30pm the previous night and took on the unfortunate task of being my helper for the morning.

I felt shook walking all the way down. My stomach was churning. Sorting out the last bits for the bike, bike bag and run bag in T1, I felt totally scattered. I completely forgot I had made a list of things to do and was trying to sort everything from memory. I couldn't focus on the task and was getting completely overwhelmed by the occasion and feeling like everything was unravelling and I just wasn't sorting my bags out right.

Once I thought I had all that sorted, I went to get myself ready for the swim only to find that I'd forgotten to pack my earplugs. F\$#%

My balance goes to hell with swimming 1k in the Barrow, I didn't want to even think how I would survive the washing machine that was the sea on Sunday. And that is no word of a lie. The sea was unbelievably choppy.

In a panic I go looking for any of our crew to see if they had any spares. But looking for them in a pool of around 3000+ in transition had proved impossible. Now I was in a real panic. I was running back in to see if anyone was in the changing tent and in the melee moving in I told a randomer that I was freaking because I really needed earplugs to get me through the swim... I know, I know.. sounds dramatic but that's how it felt right then.

Anyway, this girl just happened to have a spare pair (Marie from Piranha Tri Club) and I could have kissed her.

First panic averted.

Ok, dressed in wetsuit and all accessories to start in place I rang Ed to give him my big bag to keep during the race. He was standing at swim exit right in front of sea.

That was the closest I'd seen the sea that morning and it looked damn rough. A few people were 'warming up' in there but it looked like the sea was throwing some of them around like rag dolls.

I don't normally jump into water before an event but decided to this time.

Hmmmm.. yes, this was going to be a tough swim. But I remembered the swim at Hell of the West in Clare two years ago that was like this, so I managed to calm myself knowing that I'd done that so I could definitely do this.

It wasn't long before we had to head to our predicted swim time corrals. I decided to go into the 1:20 slot and set myself up near the front.

I could watch the pros lining up right in front of us.

Within minutes I could feel all the emotions bubbling up. The music was pumping...

I started bawling at the enormity of it all. One person approached me, asking if it was my first. Told them yes and they nodded as if to say, yup that's normal.

Shortly after, Bernie arrives into the corral. She was so nervous about the swim. Shaking like a leaf.

And maybe a tear or two.

At one point they played 'Sweet Caroline' over the speakers. Well, you should have seen me.. beaming like a Cheshire cat. I hated this song years ago cos people would sing it at me when they heard my name. But on Sunday, that song was magical. I was to go on and hear that song two more times during the race.

Eventually the event started with the pros going in first. As the age-groupers started going in, I was scanning them to see if I could see more ATC faces. Took a while but eventually they started to appear. Huge hugs and words of encouragement to each other and I was welling up again. But the adrenaline.. it's impossible to describe.. the adrenaline was pumping soo much that I was on a complete and utter high. Emotionally charged stuff this is.

The swim:

It was a rolling start so I think they let us in 6 at a time with a few seconds between each batch to spread out the athletes. Into the sea I dive. Yep, straight away you could feel yourself being tossed. From watching pros earlier, you could see the tide was pulling people away from buoys. So, I knew to re-direct myself so that I didn't get pushed away from the line of swimming. With the huge swells, sighting the buoys was also pretty damn tough. Sometimes I had to bob over one or two swells to eventually see what direction to take. Couldn't rely on following others either because so many going different directions (because of tide and poor sighting too).

Getting to the first turnaround buoy was an achievement and once around, we had the tide working with us, at least. So, the next few buoys came and went. Got to turnaround and swimming back. This time it seemed the swells were bigger. I seemed to be lifted and then would smack back down the other side from a height (or so it felt). Still though, kept going and knew, as rough as it was, I was going to do alright. There was a bit of contact with others all throughout but nothing that completely knocked me about. Also saw 4 jellies but they were low down and keeping away from us.

Was so happy to hit the turnaround point for home though.

Out of swim and I see Ed, Edwina and some of ATC crew. Boosted and off I went.

Swim: 3.8k in 1:17:48



Transition 1:

Into transition and although I didn't dawdle, I wasn't breaking records either. No change of clothes, just putting on bike accessories (helmet, shoes, etc) and nutrition load.

Picked up bike, out to mount line. Cheers from Ed and Edwina coming out of transition area (still can't believe she came over to support!!).

Out to mount line.. more shouts from ATC and I was off.

T1: 06:50

Bike:

There was a 3k technical section (with narrow and bumpy bits) that I took it handy on.

I was glad we had done a bit of a bike recce on Friday so I knew there were a few rolling hills at the start.

Heart rate was super high from the swim (and the excitement of being out on the bike too 🤪) and took a while to settle back down into proper levels. On the way to that newly introduced hill there were rumble strips across the road. It thought I was definitely going to blow a tube cos they seemed quite harsh. I was dreading this hill that was introduced too. It looked so high and sharp on the elevation chart but I needn't have worried. It was just a drag really. Not once did I have to get out of the saddle

and it just made me so happy to know that, elevation-wise, this bike course would be ok. Once I'd gotten through this section, it was flat flat, flat, flat. Everything I was told was true - this was a fast bike course. Even the wind was ok. None of the headwinds ever felt insurmountable. This was feeling great.

The bike was two laps.

Coming into Calella at end of first lap was surreal. Crowds of people and it honestly sounded as if our support crew were the loudest. Flying in that stretch of road that I'd watched soooo many times on YouTube, the roars from the ATC supporters was just, honest-to-god, spine-tingling.

Around the roundabout and back up that stretch and I hear roars from Ed and Edwina Had a little speed wobble but there was my hill booster shot and off I went again. Knowing what to expect this time, I think I enjoyed this lap even more, taking in the amazing sea views and beautiful little towns and the typical Spanish style buildings in those little towns.

Seeing loads of our crew coasting along on the route was so cool too. As someone said after, you nearly felt like you were at a home event with all our ATC participants and supporters.

Coming back into Calella on the bike I could feel myself beginning to well up. Now I actually knew, FOR A FACT, I was going to do this. I had no mechanical issue, no gastro issues, I was feeling good and I was actually going to do this.

I can't explain the feeling. This bike cut-off was forever hanging over me right up to race day and I truly believed I was going to struggle. So, to enjoy it as much as I did and see the bike finish line - words can't describe it.

Again, support crew were around every corner. They were everywhere.

Bike: 180k in 6:39:41

Transition 2:

Bike racked and into changing tent. I just changed my top, kept same tri shorts. Bike shoes and helmet off, runners on. I took nutrition out of run bag, filled bag again with bike gear and off I went.

T2: 07:41

Run:

The run started as soon as we were out of T2 tent.

It kinda threw me and I thought for a few mins that I'd gone the wrong way. But looking back into the tent I could see others doing the same, so on I went.

I wasn't 500m down the track only to realise I had left 3 hrs of run nutrition sitting on a bench back in the tent... sh!t, sh!t, sh!t. I had a nutrition plan for the whole marathon and I'd just completely blown it. Not a great start.

It was going to have to be the little bit of stuff I had stashed in my race belt - i.e. nuts and water. Then the rest had to be on-course nutrition.

At the same time, I had never tried the Enervit on course nutrition, so I was sticking with course water, oranges and nuts to get me through. And then cola when I needed an extra boost.

The run was 1.6k, followed by 3x13.5k loops, then down the red carpet.

I went out too fast on the first 1-2k. I started to pull back and then caught up with Dave. I decided to follow Dave's lead and walk the aid stations then and settle the heart rate into a maintainable zone. That worked perfectly and we took it around the first lap. Heading towards the turnaround point was a killer though. Hearing all those people being heralded in as Ironmen, knowing there was a long road ahead. BUT our unbelievable and legendary support crew soon tossed those thoughts out of the head as they roared and shouted at us going around, making us feel like bloody super heroes. Every single time I saw (or usually heard first!) one of the support crew, I just couldn't help but beam smiling. It was just hair raising.

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The first lap settled into a constant pace eventually and I was comfortable out. Dave headed off for a toilet break and I kept going. On the first lap I saw a friend from work on the sideline, cheering me on. She was supposed to be on the course too. She had certainly started. She had come back this year after DNF'ing last year and my heart honestly broke for her.

But she was amazingly selfless - in fact, cheering me right to the end.

Apart from feeling so sad for my friend, I was truly enjoying the whole experience up to around the marathon halfway point. That's when the pain started kicking in and I was hitting that point now where I knew I was going to have to tap into that mental strength reserve.

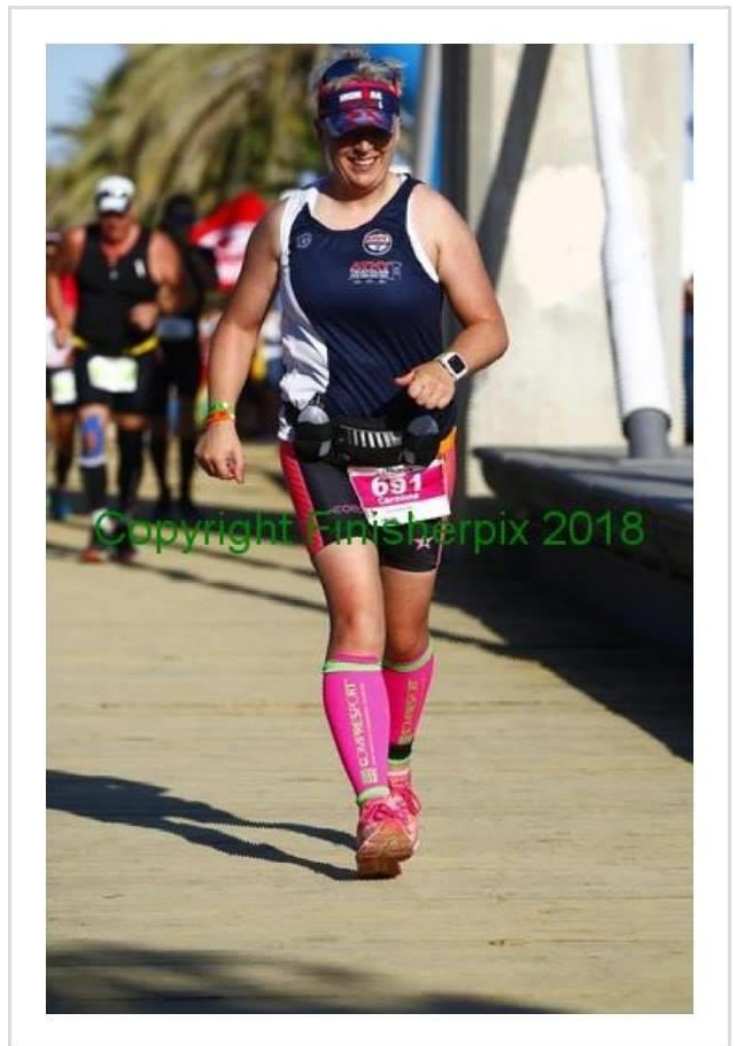
It was getting dark at this point and there is a horribly dark dog-end to the run that became so mentally hard. It seemed so long (I actually don't know how long it was but seemed to go on for forever).

You could see a lot of people struggling at this point. I could only hope the strugglers were on their last lap cos they really looked in pain.

Again, coming in on the second lap, the rain pouring down relentlessly, you could hear the shouts and roars of our gang along the run route. Honestly, you would not think these people were standing all day, dripping wet, freezing cold with the enthusiasm they had with every single yell. I soaked up their roars of encouragement and turned that bend again at the finish line to head around the last lap.

I had thought before the day started that, if I got onto last lap, I'd be boosted again cos I was on the road home.... you would think.

But it honestly just seemed to get harder.



And all I can say in that moment is.. 'I'm a f@#\$ing IRONMAN!!!!'. (*Apologies for the language*)



Hugs and kisses all round... me in awe of all those already home and so happy and proud of them.

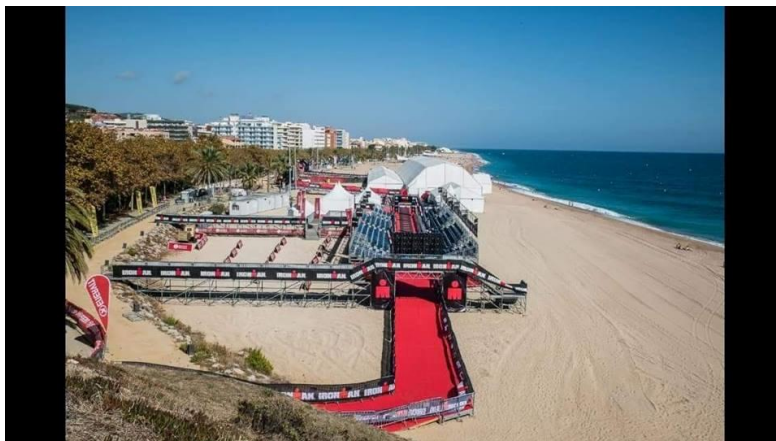
There wasn't any way in hell I wanted that day to end so I headed up to room, dumped gear, showered and changed and then came back down to celebrate and wait for everyone else to come in.

One by one, more of the crew came in.. totes emosh! Everyone was totally beaming.. hugs and kisses all around the place. A total ATC love in.

21 started this race.. 21 finished and became IRONMEN. 16 for the first time ever. This is one for the ATC history books. An epic epic adventure with epic epic people.

It's been some journey and emotional rollercoaster and I honestly couldn't have asked for better people with me on this journey both participants and supporters.

AMAZING ♡♡



CAROLINE HOWE

Finish Time
13:38:34

PRELIMINARY: Times and places may change



49th Place
out of 58
40

243rd Place
out of 309
by Gender

2,160th Place
out of 2,465
Overall

Point	Time	Time of Day	Pace
START	00:00	8:39:28 am	
Swim	1:17:48	9:57:15 am	02:03
T1	06:50 1:24:37	10:04:05 am	
Bike	6:39:41 8:04:18	4:43:45 pm	27.02
T2	07:41 8:11:58	4:51:25 pm	
Run/Finish	5:26:36 13:38:34	10:18:01 pm	07:45

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