

Wouter Coussement, #80, BEL (2017)

To prepare as best as possible, my girlfriend (who was my official supporter) and I arrived in Graz, Austria on Thursday. On Friday afternoon there was a briefing about the race. Here the trail, the rules, etc. went over. It soon became clear that it would be a very tough game, weather forecasts were tropical hot during the day and thunderstorms in the evening.

With these extreme triathlons, the participants' numbers are limited. Due to illness, accidents, injuries,... Already 90 athletes gave up before the race started. The final number of participants was 110.

Because the race is this heavy, there must be a supporter running together in the last 15km. Who else than my girlfriend could assist me in the hardest km's of the challenge?

The swimming section was held in the river 'Mur'. During the hot weeks before the race the water was relatively warm, 16°C. During the start (4:30 pm) I swam directly to the middle of the river, where the current was the hardest but I could swim comfortably and hard without being bothered by others. I noticed that the flow was harder than the day before, most likely due to the heavy rainfall the night before the match.

After swimming +/- 200m, the first U-turn had to be taken and we could swim 2km with the flow. I saw that there were not a lot of athletes swimming in front of me, so I chose a comfortable pace and tried to swim as straight as possible (which was not super easy in the beginning as it was still dark at the start). After this section we had to turn again and swim in towards the T1.

I quickly noticed that the counter current forced me to dig deep in order to maintain the pace. I tried to swim as close as possible to the shore, although I had to keep several meters away in order to avoid overhanging branches and branches / rocks underwater. After 1h03 I came out of the water as 12th. I was very pleased with this time, especially in these circumstances. This gave me a mental boost!

In the T1 I didn't lost much time; get rid of the wetsuit, put on my helmet / racebelt / etc .., eat and drink something and start the cycling part. Here too I decided to start quite quickly. On the one hand, to be able to ride as much as possible in the coolness, on the other hand, to race "comfortable" without interfering with other athletes or supporters.

After +/- 50 km I had a scary moment, in full descent (which I took in my TT-bar extensions) and at least 50km/h my front tyre exploded... Fortunately, I didn't fell and my supporter was not far so I could quickly change the wheel.

A few km's after this wheel change, the later winner passed me. I decided not to follow this pace and keep my focus on my body, the race was still very long. On the first climbs I felt very good, I was able to hold my pace and kept eating and drinking. Meanwhile I climbed to 5th place.

Between 9 and 10am it became very clear that it would get very hot, the thermometer climbed already to almost 30°C ... Lots of eating, drinking even more and trying to keep the body cool was the message! Fortunately, my supporter was on time to hand on drinks and gels.

The last col, the Sölk Pass, was a very heavy obstacle on the way to the finish. A few km at at least 10% completely blew up the legs. Add the heat and it became clear why the contest is categorised as "Extreme".

Try to survive on the climb, drink and recuperate in the descents as much as possible. These last 2 were very difficult in the last descent. On the one hand, because it was a technical descent with many smooth cattle grids, on the other hand because my brake pads were not suitable for my aluminium spare wheel... I descended as cautious as possible, Il Falco was far away J

After 187.5km and 7 hours 17 minutes in the saddle I was hoping for fresh legs and I was very curious what would happen during the run.

In T2 it the heat became quickly clear! I felt the sun almost literally fall on my head. As in T1, no time is wasted here; put on my compression tubes, eat / drink, trailrunning backpack with 2L sportsdrink on and GO!

The start of the running section first starts over a dam and then directly into the forests. Again, the organizers do their utmost best to make the athletes feel that this is an extreme race J. First, via super-technical trails over tree roots down and after 3km there is a very steep slope (actually a grassland) waiting. From here, my survival mode was turned on.

The run takes the athletes to very beautiful spots, along a river/forests/railway/... After 28km, I reached the checkpoint where I started the last 16km with my supporter. From here as good as no flat meters anymore. The heaviest running part is at the end of the race. The

path to the penultimate checkpoint, the Südwand-Hütte, literally shredded the legs. After this checkpoint we had to overtake 2 snow passages to finish! After 6h45min I reached the finish.

Eventually I finished as 12th, in 15h30. A result of which I am very proud of!

The slogan of the race is "It twill change your life", for my supporter and me this was literal and figurative ;-)