

Tim Wolvetang, #42, NED (2017)

WHAT. A. DAY:

The Austria eXtreme Triathlon was in agenda for quite some time and had been marked as 'the big one'. It has a reputation as one of the toughest full distance triathlons in the world.

Preparing for such an event requires dedication, sacrifice, and a lot of patience, and even then its almost impossible. Nonetheless Ive travelled to Austria twice to train trailrunning in the mountains (hills?), got a pretty hard training schedule and coaching from Bert Flier and entered a swim course under Frank Huisman. The first real 'training' was IRONMAN 70.3 St. George Utah, which turned to be under suprisingly similar (HOT) circumstances, and in the following week I cycled just over 1000km with 11.000m of elevation: the best preparation possible!

Usually I'm nervous for a race. The Austria Extreme was no exception. It was even worse, as it's also quite a logistical operation. Because there are no aid stations on the course you'll have organize this yourself. Johannes Perkonig was friendly enough to drive his car along the entire day. On top of that I had to find a support for the final part of the run, which is more or less only uphill, in Tijn Huberts I found a strong runner capable of dragging me and all the nessecary stuff up the final mountain.

SWIM 04:30 3800m

The swim started at 4:30, which meant I had to get up at 2 AM in order to get my nutrician right and make it in time to prepare and check in my bike. After some almost two hours of sleep I wasnt really sure what to expect, but the only way to find out was to start. The Mur river was unusually hot this year (16c): a good start. Just before the start I jumped into the water to acclimatize and noticed the current of the river was fortunately also not to strong. At exactly 4:30 the start-cowbell was sounded and we were off! As part of my meticulous preparation I had left my good goggles at home, so I had to swim with my spare set which have bad periferal sight. I managed to keep with the front group around the first buoy, then I thought I got dropped. Surprisingly though, I found them swimming to my right. After trying to chase them for some 100-200meters I decided I should try an all or nothing attempt to catch up, so i could draft behind them for the rest of the swim. Fortunately cougth up and stayed in their feet for the rest of the swim. We even lost some other swimmers along the way, but this time not me :D

Swim time: an amazing 1h04!

BIKE ~05:40 186KM, +3900m ELEVATION

After a relatively short transition the longest leg of the day started: a 186km bike ride straight through Styria, crossing the Gaberl pass (1551m), Schonberg (1013m), Kammerberg, and finally the Sölkpass (1790m). The 50-34 chainrings Koerscc had fitted were a very welcome adjustment for this race. As were my new Duke Baccara wheels by Parallel Handbuilt: light and aero!

My strategy was to hold back on the bike as much as possible. I started the bike somewhere in the top 10, I think 4th or 5th, but because of this strategy I was passed by at least 10 guys on the first 40kms. I couldn't really care though, it was going to be a long day and conserving energy is part of it, especially because it was going to be hot. I remember the first mountain, Gaberl, as 'how long is this climb still going to be?!' But after Gaberl, the following two climbs were relatively so short I hardly noticed them as climb. All was going really smooth on bike, until this M-F-ing pass called Sölkpass. This thing is long and steep, with a final 1.5km of about 15%. During the climb I had to abuse my legs for the first time, not what I had planned, but I had to get up there somehow. It is special to experience the serenity on top as opposed to the brutal climb I'd undertaken to get there. You'd almost forget you're in a race! Just as the year before, the organization had arranged for accordionist on the top. Unfortunately I did not have much time to enjoy. The descend from Sölkpass was as scary as the climb was brutal for a lowlander. I was directly passed by the 3 guys I had overtaken on the way up. The descend leads into Transition 2, the toughest part of the race. Bike time: a sluggish 7h51!!

RUN ~13:30 44KM, +1900m ELEVATION

The run starts at the Großsölk dam, a scenic starting point for the final leg of the race. I had been saving energy all day for the run. To be more specific: the second half of the run. I felt pretty confident that I could do a good run. But then there was the heat, some 34 degrees of heat that made me walk on the first uphill part until I noticed some chasers. This kept me running for the first 2.5km, until the first real climb: a grassland that went almost straight up! It had the highest gradient I've ever seen on Garmin/strava: 44%! After this there were some kilometers in the shade and there was some wind. On this part I managed to run at a normal pace. In the valley there was not so much wind, no shade, no nothing, in order to cool down I had to do a lot of walking in between the running. Not what I had planned, but one has to do what one has to do to get to the finish. This went on till, after which the trails went uphill again. It was a lonely struggle until the penultimate checkpoint, [Silberkarklamm](#),

where Tijn Huberts joined me on the final stretch up the [Dachstein](#) mountain.

By the time we started the final ca 10km Tijn had motivated me to speed up again. After we passed the first couple a second couple came into sight. Before we reached the [Dachstein Südwandhütte](#) we caught 3 or 4 other couples. This motivated me to keep powering through! We had seen another couple, on the top of the climb to the SüdwandHütte, but deemed them to far ahead. The final kilometers of the run go downhill. This was a very welcome change from climbing, downhill also suits me better somehow. After we passed two snowy parts of the glacier we could see the finish, and.... another couple walking. Although the Austria Extreme is about enjoying the landschape and 'just' finishing it was still a race to me (sorry Wouter Coussement). I started speeding up and ran as fast as I could past them, almost dropping Tijn.
Run time ~6h14 (last 500m @ 3:50/km ;))

FINISH 19:59 Total time: 15h29, 11th place

This was the most memorable race I've done! A big adventure during which I was broken several time, but got myself together and powered on. The heat made it a particularly tough edition: only 45 of 125 athletes finished! Huge respect to Michael Strasser for winning, but also to all athletes finishing after 9pm in the rain, hail, thunder, lightning, and more rain!!

Next 'big' race: ITU Grand Final World Championships sprint distance

alHuge thanks to all people making this possible for me:

[Team Zoot Tri Europe](#) , Koerscc , Parallel Handbuilt , Bert Flier , Frank Huisman @ [Tri-Experience](#) , Johannes Perkonig , [Christina Perkonig](#) , Charlie and [Waltraud Perkonig](#) , Tijn Huberts, and all others i've trained with: you know who you are!