

Peter Rondas, BEL #130

Austria extreme triathlon 2019

June 22nd 2019, 04:30 in the morning at the river Mur in Graz, here we are in our wetsuit ready to embark on an incredible journey which will take us through the breathtaking landscape of Austria.

We (85 participants if I am correct) are at the start of the Austria eXtreme triathlon 2019. Together with us are our supporters, friends, family, spectators and the crew which will make this day unforgettable.

The countdown is given and we launch our self. A test swim on Thursday (first time river swimming) made us feel the current and to get around the first buoy is already an effort, once achieved, the current takes us fast to the turning point. 1.6km Upstream swimming is waiting for us. All the athletes are close to the shore to avoid the current as much as possible. Surprisingly, I advance not too badly and after 1h06 I am back at the transition zone. Spectators, supporters and crew are cheering and my supporter François is helping where possible to get me on the bike for a ride of 186 km.

Supporter cars are passing by, easy recognizable by the little flags and stickers. A friendly word when athletes are passing each other, a constant cheering of all the supporters, spectators and crew for all the athletes, this will be a great day. The first mountain pass is looming ahead of us (Gaberl). A short but heavy rainfall of 10 minutes during the ascent doesn't stop us and when reaching the summit (checkpoint), the road is dry for the descent. A short stop at the supporter car for some drinks and food and a jacket to continue with a beautiful downhill that takes us to Zeltweg and further to the checkpoint at Oberzeiring.

I am on schedule and feeling well and my friend/colleague Christophe is also progressing well on the bike. We have recognized the bike course some weeks ago and we know the most difficult part is at the end so we are trying not to go too fast. The second and third mountain pass are easier and does not present major problems. A stop at the bottom of the final climb, the Sölkpass, to get some extra energy and away we are for the final stretch of the bike ride.

Thunderstorms are building up around us but I am hoping to pass without rain. Unfortunately, we do not pass in dry conditions. The gates of hell are opening 4 km before the summit with heavy rain fall, lightning, thunder and mist at the top. I am soaking wet and cold. My supporter

gives me two wind jackets and long gloves to attack the descent. 4 km of winding roads, shivering on the bike and not feeling the brakes, let us call it extreme triathlon. The last 14 km are less steep and winding and I decide to pedal as fast as possible to warm up.

Arriving at transition 2, I find myself among 5 other athletes in the tent with the same problems; we are all shivering from cold and are soaking wet. The supporters make it as comfortable as possible for us helping whoever and wherever they can. Towels and blankets are passed around and we try to put dry clothes for the 44 km of running.

The question of which shoes I will put on is no more valid, trail shoes it will be. I need 30 minutes to prepare myself with the help of a lot of people before starting the final run. It is still raining hard and I wonder if the conditions will stay like this if I will be able to finish. First 11 km to reach the first meeting point with my supporter are going not to bad (walking uphill and running when possible on downhill and flat).

The rain is becoming less intense and starting to Aich (km 18, checkpoint 1), it stops and the sun is trying to get through. Getting to the finish should be possible in these conditions and from km 27, we have our supporter with us. From Aich on, it becomes more walking than running and it is mostly uphill. I am well ahead of the time limits which gives a boost to moral. At the next check point (Silberkarklamm, km 27), François is waiting for me with the necessary equipment to continue for the final stretch of the run.

17 km of walking with a good friend in an astonishing landscape, what do we want more? The wetter is perfect, we admire a beautiful sunset and the finish is getting closer. The last checkpoint (Glösalm) is ahead of us and the final ascent to the Südwanthütte (1910 m) is the last difficult part. We make it with the last daylight to the mountain cabin and start our descent to the finish. 20 Minutes later, we are welcomed by the sound of cow bells, applause and a lot of smiling faces.

My watch says 22:01 which makes it a journey of 17h31 of pure happiness, suffering, joy, a little bit of pain and a lot of unforgettable memories. A little later, my friend Christophe is crossing the finish line with his supporter Eddy. A great day is behind us.

I would like to emphasize is : What a journey it was! 7 Months of training till June 22nd was already quite something, scheduling trainings between work and family, moments of doubt, evenings of preparation, ... But nothing of all this would have been possible without the team of the Austrian extreme triathlon.

I can only share my upmost respect and gratitude to all of the team to make this journey possible. And of course the same goes to all my family, friends, supporters, spectators and fellow athletes as well but still, without you this triathlon does not exist.

Since two years, I am looking for this kind of triathlons, away from the big events, the stress, ... The Austrian extreme triathlon has it all : great team, great scenery, great ambiance, super sportsmanship, ... A thank you to all the team is an understatement. I hope sincerely that you will find the courage, the will and the team to continue this great event. The idea of not having this triathlon on the calendar would be a terrible loss. For the moment it is too early to say 'I'll be back' but what I know for sure is that I will never say 'never again' and that I will always remember this journey.

Yours sincerely, Peter Rondas #130 - 2019