

Ben Bright for Triathlon Performance Solutions

For the beginner triathlete there is nothing more daunting than the prospect of your first race. All the hours of training you put in will count for little if you are unprepared for race day and, in a panic, put on your cycling shoes for the bike leg or worse, forget to bring a vital piece of equipment like your bike. You might think these types of things would never happen but they do, and they happen quite often. Below is a list of tips to help you to avoid a disaster on the big day.

Start Small, Build Up:

If you're looking to do your first ever triathlon try to resist the urge of making it an Ironman. There are many people out there who want the ultimate challenge of an Ironman but, if you actually want to enjoy the experience, start out with some smaller events and build up to your ultimate goal. It's a good idea to do this even if you are racing an Olympic distance. Pick 2-3 shorter races to do before your main event so you can practice everything you will do and use - pacing, nutrition, equipment etc. - and avoid any major disasters. The Golden Rule for your big event is to never try anything new.

Enter Early and Read the Info:

Races in the UK are filling up incredibly fast these days. Triathlon is really booming so you need to be really quick to get into events, especially the well known ones like Windsor, Blenheim or London.

Once you have entered you should receive information from the race organizer about the event. Make sure you read it all and then read it again. There should be information on when you need to arrive, how to get there, where to park if you drive, what you need to do upon arrival etc. There is nothing more stressful getting to the race site late, not knowing where to park, not knowing where to go and not knowing when you are starting. If you can't find the info you need then get in touch with the race organizer and ask. There is normally plenty of info on the event website to help as well.

Train the Terrain:

If the course has any specific challenges then make sure you prepare for them. Do some open water swimming in training if your race is in the open water. If the bike or run is particularly hilly then make sure you train in the hills. If the run is part or all off road then train off road. That way your body and mind will be prepared for the specifics of your event.

Mentally Prepare:

Three to four weeks out from the event start to do some visualization of your race day once every 2-3 days. Take 10-15 minutes in the evening just before you drop off to sleep to go through your processes, from the point you wake up on the morning of the race right through to your finish. Imagine how you will feel when you are racing and how you will deal with any difficult situations that may arise - flat tyre, unexpected fatigue, getting kicked in the swim etc. If you are able to do any training on the course beforehand this will help the process because you will be able to imagine yourself in the race environment.

Make a Plan:

Write down a timeline, beginning from the night before the race, until your race start. Having a plan for what you will do will allow you to relax and hopefully sleep well the night before you race because you know what you will be doing and when you will do it. Include details like when you are going to eat the evening before, what you will eat, time you will go to bed, time you will wake up, what you will eat for breakfast, time you will leave for the event, time you will check in, set up transition, warm up be at the race start line etc. Leave some leeway for the unexpected (multiple toilet breaks, long queues) so it's not a rush.

Pack and Check and Check again:

Around mid week prior to your race start to take an inventory on what you will need for your race. At the bottom of this article I will give you a checklist you can use but you should personalize it to suit your needs. Start getting all your equipment together early so that if you are missing something you have time to find it or replace it. You won't get a good night's sleep before the race if you know you have lost your swim goggles and it was too late to buy another pair. Put everything you will need either in a kit bag or just in one location so you know where it all is. The day before the race you can then go through your list and pack everything without having to hunt high and low for things.

Race Tactics:

If you're not a confident swimmer then start near the back of your wave or to the side to avoid the mosh pit at the beginning of the race. Focus on your technique and count your strokes to keep yourself calm.

Be methodical in T1 and T2. Have a process you will follow and don't rush. A slow transition without any mistakes will beat a rushed transition with mistakes.

Start slowly on the swim and bike. Most people start each leg too fast and then have to slow down to recover before settling into their natural rhythm. This is a really inefficient way to pace yourself. If you start slowly you can always build your pace and go faster.

Race Day Kit List:

Pre Race:

- Directions to the event
- Money + Bank Card
- BTF Race License
- Umbrella
- Sunscreen
- GPS Multisport watch

Warming Up:

- Run Training Shoes
- Waterproof Jacket
- Running tights or tracksuit bottoms
- Hoodie
- Gloves
- Beanie
- Warm cycling kit if you are going to warm up on the bike
- Your pre race food and drink
- Towel

Swim:

- Wetsuit
- Official race Cap
- Goggles and spare goggles
- Race suit
- Bodyglide or vaseline or baby oil for your wetsuit
- Race number and race belt

Bike:

- Bike and race wheels
- Spare tyre, tubes
- Pump and tyre levers
- Mini Tool
- Bike shoes
- Helmet
- Glasses
- Drink bottle/s with sports drink
- Gels and/or Sports bars

Run:

- Race shoes
- Hat
- Gel/s if you need them

Post Race:

- Recovery food and drink
- Spare set of clothes
- Bin liner for your wet kit