



# THE HEADLINE ACT

*Invited to his first-ever triathlon festival as a 'famous triathlon face', Bruntly also discovers the many advantages of racing early*



## MARTYN BRUNT

Martyn is tri's foremost average athlete and is living proof that hours of training and endless new kit are no substitute for ability.

In the past I've always associated festivals with muddy fields, tents that end up looking like a student's kitchen, watching bands I haven't seen for 20 years, and suffering from constipation rather than visit the campsite 'Turdis' (as festival portaloos are known). But I'm delighted to say that my first tri festival was nothing like that, although I still ended up trudging home looking like a hipster's ghost, thanks this time though to athletic effort in the heat rather than drinking my own body weight in value-brand cider.

The festival in question was the Ripon Tri Festival, an event organised by the splendid folks at NYP Tri in Yorkshire and involved a standard-distance race on the Saturday, a sprint-distance race on the Sunday, Tristar kids races, barbeques, live music, Q&A and Expo, all at lovely Ripon racecourse. The festival, in support of Yorkshire Air Ambulance, attracted over 1,200 athletes with the majority camping,

which, combined with the hot weather and sponsorship by Black Sheep Brewery, gave everything a big tri-party atmosphere.

To add a touch of celebrity glamour the whole event was kicked off with a Q&A with 'famous triathlon faces', including Olympian and European gold medallist Gordon Benson, ITU world duathlon champ Suzie Richards, star of Channel 5's 'The Yorkshire Vet', author and accomplished triathlete and mountain-biker Julian Norton, and lastly some bloke who writes knob-gags at the back of *220 Triathlon*.

Needless to say, in this kind of company, I was exposed as the bluffer I am – very much the equivalent of a person who tries to impress others with their medical knowledge by saying things like 'there's a lot of it about'. But I enjoyed trying to get through an hour's public speaking without blurting out something rude, and I was delighted to get so many questions from the audience, my favourite being 'How did you become so average at tri?'

Race day dawned with the two words triathletes dread more than any other – 'non-wetsuit'. Fishy types like me always relish the swim leg being made harder for the

masses, so I enjoyed using my gibbon arms to get near-ish to the front of my wave, coming out of the water after 1,500m well inside the top 20, meaning I could focus on losing my hard-won advantage by faffing about putting socks on in T1.

My swimming inevitably put me nearer the front than my overall tri talent deserved, so the bike course largely involved 40km of cycling through picturesque Yorkshire villages while being repeatedly overtaken by cyclists with disc wheels. But I managed to pick off a few other riders before embarking on the extremely warm 10km run along country lanes and alongside the Ripon canal. By the finish I was so hot I was sweating energy gel, and my attempt at a sprint over the grassy finish was very much a case of 'I fought the lawn and the lawn won'. But my finishing time of a shade under 2:30hrs proves that my average triathlete star status remains undimmed. And the good thing about doing the first race in a triathlon festival is that you get to:

- Sit down and talk a load of bobbins with everyone else about your race.
- Eat huge amounts of food and drink ale completely free of any guilt.
- Get up late and watch a load of other people racing knowing you've already done your bit.

And so it was with me, spending a pleasant evening drinking Black Sheep, chatting to *220* readers and hoovering up food like an ant eater and, thanks to my effort on the run, walking like a wardrobe with a head injury.

I'd like to express my enormous thanks to Dave Mann and all at NYP Tri for inviting me to take part; God knows the effort it must take to put something like this on and make it so successful, I can't even organise my mates to come out on a bike ride without someone getting lost in the car park. And to everyone else, if you're looking for a festival next year, forget Glastonbury, Reading, Leeds, V or the Big Weekend, head up to Ripon, it's warmer than the Bahamas and the beer's a lot better. **220**

*"I enjoyed trying to get through an hour's public speaking without swearing"*