

## Ironman Lanzarote 2015 by Simon G.

Well, 9 years after doing Nice I decided I wanted to do another Ironman - before I get too old! There was only one choice really - the most iconic course in Europe and probably the World (Hawaii being the possible exception - but you have to be good enough to qualify for that!). So whilst in a good mood last summer, I found myself pressing the “submit” button on the entry form for Lanzarote...now for the training.

I basically followed the same plan I used for Nice but with extra concentration on long bike rides - this apparently being the key to Lanza. My bike and swim training went just fine, but as for Ironman France, running injuries interfered with that discipline. Calf muscles this time, shin problems last! This wasn't unexpected as I haven't been able to run as much as I'd like to for the last ten years or so. Road running particularly causes problems, so most of my training consisted of long, stamina type, fell runs with my longest pre-race road run being 5km. Good preparation for the marathon part. Ha Ha!

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May I flew out to Puerta Del Carmen. Over the next few days this popular holiday resort became overrun with “Iron Fever”. Every morning people were out testing their wetsuit swimming in the sea, and all day other Iron hopefuls were running or biking along the promenade. The atmosphere was buzzing and I loved it. At my apartment complex, there was an amusing mixture of about one third athletes from all over the World and two thirds “normal” holiday makers swigging beer and sunbathing. I was right next to the pool area, so was once or twice disturbed by late night revellers. I didn't complain. Usually, I would be one.

I had arranged to meet up with Ozzie (also staying at La Penita), for a couple of short bike rides. Tuesday's ride we cut short because it was pretty windy. Too late to get any fitter now and neither of us wanted to do too much in the days before.

Little did we know...Wednesday was horrendous! Being woken during the night by a howling gale wasn't a good sign. It calmed down a bit so we attempted a short bike ride in the afternoon. As soon as you got out of the resort it became a struggle to remain upright on the bike. These

were different winds to the usual type in the UK. Very unpredictable, fierce gusts that seemed to come from any direction, without warning. A guy on a triathlon bike came past us fast - we were impressed until he came off 30 yards in front. Luckily, he was unhurt but that was enough for us. Probably the scariest short ride I've ever done. Back to the hotel we went. It had been a sobering experience. The fact that Lanza vets told us this was the worst they'd ever known it didn't really help much. Thankfully, the forecast for race day, although not great, was slightly less windy. Fingers crossed, Ozzie and I resolved to be on the start line and see what happens.

On Thursday morning we met up with some other Tri Talk guys for a sea swim. There were loads of other triathletes out practising and I did about 30 minutes training. The water was cool and clear but rather choppy. Not lovely and calm like Nice was. The good thing about the Lanzarote swim course is that you don't go out too far - most of the 2.4 miles is parallel to the beach - so if it got too bad you would hopefully still be able to swim ashore. Later, I registered at Club La Santa on the other side of Lanzarote. There was lots of lovely merchandise to buy there too. Somehow I managed to come back nearly 300 Euros lighter (Don't tell Nadine!!!). Well, I only intend to do this race once...

Ozzie's family came out Thursday evening and we all walked down to transition together on the Friday afternoon. By now, Puerta del Carmen was packed and it felt good to be finally dropping off our bikes and transition bags. I cooked my own tuna and pasta meal that evening as I didn't want to risk any chance of food poisoning from a restaurant meal. Unlikely, but you never know. An early night resulted in virtually no sleep for me. I knew that would happen so I wasn't concerned about it and just lay there trying not to think about the race too much.

Soon my 3 alarms went off and it was time to get moving. At about half 5 we all walked the short kilometre to the transition zone, passing a few people crawling out of night clubs. It was just the same as in Nice. But unlike Nice, absolutely everyone seemed to know about this race going on so they didn't look surprised to see triathletes carrying wetsuits etc.

The next part was a blur and suddenly we were all in the starting pen. Although we were similar standard swimmers, Ozzie wanted to start near the back for a calmer swim. I moved further forward and to the right so as to swim wider around the buoys for the first few turns. It was windy, but not like on the Wednesday and so for that I was very, very grateful. I wanted to have a chance of finishing.

BANG!! We were off. The first lap was relatively calm and I hardly got bashed at all. An unexpectedly fast split time of 37:02 and I moved closer to the buoys, thinking I might get near my Nice swim of 1:11. Surprisingly, the second lap was a lot rougher. Both the sea itself as the sun rose and the wind picked up, but also I got battered by other swimmers. Nothing too bad but a fair few kicks and my goggles got half knocked off. I can only imagine that a lot of people became more aggressive as the finish approached. Personally, I always move away from any trouble - not being a big and strong guy I reckon that's the best policy! I didn't want my race to be over already. Sadly for 20 people it was - 5 of them hospitalised apparently. Hopefully, not for anything too serious.

Having survived the swim...(I'm the good looking one - haha!)



**1:18:53 for the swim.** I was happy with that.

A quick toilet stop for me and a quick transition too. I had resolved to do this. Over the years (and nearly 50 triathlons now), I've found it better to rush through transitions and take a "breather" when out on the bike/run - at least you're still moving then. So, along the Playas de la Americas we went. Hundreds of spectators cheering which, as always when crowds do this, gave me a buzz. But soon, we left the town behind and began climbing towards Yaiza. Two things became obvious early on. Firstly, I must have had a relatively good swim and

transition as absolutely loads of faster cyclists came past me in the first 30 km. Also, it was windy! Not as bad as on the Wednesday (which had been bordering on “impossible” for me) but the gusts were continuous and strong. Over the course, the wind was predominantly Northerly which was helpful at least for most of the last 50 km or so. Near Yaiza, I saw the leaders coming the other way before I went to tackle the El Golfo loop myself. The scenery was impressive but soon moved up a notch from that to awesome as we cycled up into the “Fire Mountains”. I loved this part and for the first time began to overtake more than just the occasional other cyclist. Climbing has always been a strength of mine (but unfortunately, descending is correspondingly poor!). We had now done almost a third of the route. So far, the wind wasn’t getting any worse so I began to think I should definitely finish. I just needed to pace myself carefully.

Onwards, we travelled, through pretty inland villages before swooping down towards La Santa and the coast. A few more hills, then down again to Famara before the main climbs began. I had again lost places on the descents but as we climbed up to Teguise in the middle of Lanzarote, I overtook people again. Around here, I saw the first casualties of the race sat or slumped at the side of the road - for medical, not mechanical, reasons. The heat, wind and hills were taking their toll. However, for me, the next 40 km were to be my best. I absolutely loved the climb up to Mirador del Haria and even enjoyed the hairpin descents, going faster than I usually would as “race fever” came over me!

The Mirador del Rio was even more spectacular - with fantastic views across the turquoise blue sea towards the island of La Graciosa. Then a straight and long descent for 5 km or so on perfectly smooth roads down to the coast again at Arrieta. Exhilarating! This was fun. We were slowly climbing again towards Tahiche and then the infamous sting in the tail up to Nazaret. I was getting near the finish of this epic ride now and just needed to be careful. There were some rough road surfaces (I believe one of them is known in Lanza as the “donkey track”) and scary descents as we neared Puerta del Carmen. I began to feel quite saddle sore but otherwise okay. It was annoying to be overtaken by about ten people in the final descents to the town but

the crosswinds were particularly ferocious here and I daren't lose control. I later learned that Dave M (a fellow Tri Talker) came off around here and broke his collar bone in two places. He then spent 40 minutes getting patched up in T2 before hobbling around the marathon in a sling. Amazing! As I entered the promenade roads and the crowd roar again, I felt quite emotional. The bike ride had gone well and I had stopped just once for 2 minutes. I would surely now finish this race!

**8:06:29 for the bike course.** On this day, and for me, delighted with that.

I ran through T2 and was soon off and running the marathon. However, just like in Nice, the efforts of the day caught up with me at this point and I felt grim. The wind didn't matter anymore but it was still hot. My legs were fine but I felt sick and had neck and back pain across the shoulder area. I decided to adopt a walk/run strategy - which seems to work better for me than the very slow but continuous plod that some people do. The course was 3 loops this year. The first, longer one, going



right past the airport and Playa Honda to a 10.5 km point and back again. It was nice to have this relatively unsupported section along the side of the airport to take a breather - without the constant encouragement from spectators to keep moving. I tried to keep running for the whole of this first 10 km but the split time suggests otherwise! There's no hiding place. I was just hoping to feel better later on.

Anyway, I kept up this run/walk strategy for the next 2 laps and was still moving faster than most of the other competitors still going. Time ticked by...the sun retreated until it was suddenly the final turn. I tried to finish strongly, aiming to beat 5 hours for the marathon...hmmm...I

don't think your average club runner would be impressed! A final sprint and there it was. The finish! A few photos, a medal and some refreshments beckoned. I felt okay really. Better than in Nice.

**5:03:16 for the marathon.** My slowest time ever but it was all I could do.

The next morning at the airport I reflected on my race...could I have pushed the marathon harder? Easy for me to think that now - in hind sight. To be honest, I'm delighted with how it went. I believe that more competitors than ever didn't finish the bike or swim course and I have my medal. It was a really tough race and an awesome experience. Anyone who half fancies this race - do it! Thanks also to Simon and Emma, who spoke so glowingly about this race and helped convince me I had to enter.



**14:46:52 in total.**

**1197<sup>th</sup> out of 1462 finishers. 1786 starters.**