

Triathlon for the Athletically Challenged

Confessions of a Confirmed Klutz by Steve Hamlin

If passing gas was a sport, I would have been an Olympian. But, for better or for worse, flatulation has never been sanctioned. To say that I was no athlete as a kid is the ultimate understatement. After winning a blue ribbon in broad jumping in the sixth grade (mostly owing to the fact that in broad jumping one has only to make sure to fall FORWARD), my best performance in scholastic sports was in picking my seat. But, I digress. This is supposed to be about triathlon.

When triathlon is mentioned, many people immediately think of the "Konaheads" from TV. You know: Speedo-clad, goggle-eyed human ocelots emerging from a six mile open-sea swim and jumping on space-age bicycles to ride 110 miles, only to finish with a 26 mile run. Any one of these feats is beyond the reach of most of the people I know.

But, triathlon doesn't have to be a superhuman effort. Short course triathlons, and especially canoe triathlons, are not only athletically accessible to the average person, but, if

done as a team, are a heck of a lot of fun. No matter where you place, there are few feelings to compare with the post-race glow.

One does have to prepare though. Training is crucial to having fun in a race. Without at least a token amount of training, the shortest race is an exercise in frustration. Besides, training is at least half the fun of racing. You can burn off much of the frustration of daily life in the name of training. Had a tough day at work? Pound the pavement for a few miles. Fight with the spouse? Kids making you crazy? A good, hard paddle (on the lake) can be very therapeutic. You'll be healthier, sleep better and have a more positive outlook on life if you train regularly. And, any time spent in training will pay big dividends on race day.

Almost as important as the training is the choosing of a team. Nothing can take the shine off a great performance like the frustration of watching the lead you worked so hard to get,

being squandered by teammates who are ill-prepared. Equally disheartening is the feeling of being the anchor weighing the team down.

It's okay to just have a lark in a race, as long as it's a team lark. On choosing your teammates or being chosen by someone else, you should make it clear that you are just in it for a good time, or that you are driven by a personal need to succeed. By knowing what you're capable of, and by setting realistic goals with your teammates, you can hopefully head off a frustrating experience.

Remember, though, that your ultimate goal is to have a good time. Everybody has the occasional bad day: bikes flat, canoes flip and runners get hangnails. So don't expect your teammates to share your vision exactly. Triathlon is like life - you aim for Utopia, but settle for Des Moines. Anyway, there's always the next race.

So, train hard, have good fortune, but, above all, enjoy the race!

CHILDREN & HELMETS

A recent study by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission showed that children are more likely than adults to be injured on a bicycle. That's understandable, since children are less experienced and more inclined to engage in risky behavior. Lawmakers in many jurisdictions have responded to the special vulnerability of young cyclists by passing legislation requiring helmet use by children.

At least nine states, eight counties and nine cities now have children's bike-helmet laws, which generally call for misdemeanor tickets to be issued to the parents of children caught riding without helmets. Most helmet laws

have gone into effect so recently that there aren't yet a lot of statistics available on their effectiveness. But in the year following its enactment, New Jersey's 1992 helmet law was credited with reducing child bicycle deaths in the state from 10 to 2. Helmet use in New Jersey has skyrocketed to 70% of riders, and has risen even among older riders who aren't directly affected by the law.

While helmet laws obviously help, parents still bear the primary responsibility for encouraging helmet use and safe riding. Here are some cycling-safety tips:

- o Wear a helmet yourself whenever you ride your bike. Your example can be more persuasive, and easier, than resorting to parental authority.
- o Don't buy a helmet that's too large, thinking the child will grow into it. A

helmet that's too big is likely to roll off, reducing its ability to protect.

o Adjust a child's helmet so it fits snugly and correctly. Readjust fit as the child grows.

o Discourage children from riding at times when accidents are most prevalent, at dawn, dusk and at night.

o Encourage a child to ride on bike paths or in other low-traffic areas.

o National Safe Kids Campaign, based in Washington, D.C., is launching a nationwide, community-based bicycle safety program called **Safe Kids Cycle Smart** in spring, 1995. To find out if there is a Safe Kids Coalition in your area, write to: National Safe Kids Campaign, 111 Michigan Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20010.

Information excerpted from an article in Consumer Reports.