

# Some Quick Tri Tips

By Brad Dalrymple

Triathlon is a strange sport, and there's a fair bit to get your head around. Not only do you have to do three very dissimilar disciplines, but you have to learn how to combine them all – using another unusual combination of endurance, speed and strength. I don't think I've ever walked away from a race without having learnt something and although my experience is modest at best, I thought I'd share a few little tips that might help those getting into this weird past-time....

## Pre-Race:

- *Diet:* I would highly recommend seeing a dietician. One thing that works for me is that I reduce my fibre intake the day or two before a race (although it won't be too different from normal). It might not be necessary for everyone, but I find it reduces the likelihood of any stomach problems during the race. I don't eat anything less than 60 to 90 minutes before my race for the same reason.
- *Get Organised:* Make sure you have all your gear before leaving home. It'd suck turning up to a race without your helmet, etc.

## Transition:

- *Set-Up:* You don't need much gear in transition (bike, water on bike, running shoes, bike shoes, helmet, sunnies, race belt, and possibly a hat for the run), but make sure it's all there. If it's likely to be hot and the first drink stop is a long way off, I leave a throw-away water bottle in transition that I can take out on the run and drink and splash on myself as I start my run.
- *Orientation:* After setting up your gear in transition – orientate yourself in transition. Walk/ jog the in's and out's of transition (eg. swim/ bike/ run exit/ entry) a few times. Keep an eye out for a landmark or two and/ or (if bike rows are numbered) make sure you know which rack numbers you're between. I leave a ridiculously red Hawaiian shirt on the ground (under my shoes), which sticks out like the proverbial. You don't have to go Hawaiian, but something bright and unique will make it easier to spot your gear.

## Swim:

- *Warm-up:* Have a good warm-up swim. I swim for about 5 or so minutes (mainly slow/ aerobic with a few short surges to get the blood pumping). Some time before jumping in the water, I'll also go for a similar jog/ run and stretch.
- *Water Start:* If the start is in the water (ie. not on the shore), I'll spread myself (ie. float with my feet way out the back and kicking and my arms way out to the side) in the 15 seconds or so before the start to give myself plenty of room (and reduced the likelihood of being entangled with other swimmers) at the swim start. I also try and be behind (or next to) someone who I know can swim faster than me (that way I know I won't need to swim through them and can drag off them at least for a little while). If you're a wee bit nervous, you won't lose much time by just hanging at the back of the swim pack for the start.

- *Shore Start*: If the start is from the shore, walk in/ out of the water before the race where the swim starts from the shore – to get a feel for water depths, etc.
- *First Buoy*: The turn at the first buoy can be a bit stressful as there's usually lots of swimmers all aiming for the same point. Best just to keep cool and expect to be roughed up a bit, and kick harder around the buoy to make the turn quicker.
- *Reduce Drag*: Swimming's easier/ faster with less drag/ resistance. So, if you can find someone who's a similar pace (or a wee bit faster), try to get on their feet and stay there (without slowing them and you down by slapping their feet too much).
- *Technique/ Tempo*: It's easy to forget about your technique and tempo (ie. the pace you can sustain throughout the race) in all the action, so try not to.
- *Straight Line*: No need to swim longer than you have to, so make sure you're on course and swimming in the right direction. Look ahead every 10 strokes or so (trying to maintaining a streamline position – ie. don't drop your legs and increase drag) and/ or keep an eye on the other swimmers (or landmarks).
- *Nearing the Swim End*: In the last 50+ metres of your swim, increase your kicking frequency/ intensity to get your mojo back into your legs – it'll make it a helluva lot easier to start running when you finish your swim.

#### T1:

- *Keep Cool*: If you're anything like me, you'll probably be pretty buggered in the 1<sup>st</sup> transition and this makes it a lot easier to make mistakes (eg. getting lost, can't get your helmet on properly). If you have previously done your pre-race transition orientation, have a think about what you're about to do (just before coming into transition) and stay relaxed, doing T1 should come pretty automatically (and fast).
- *Helmet*: You get DQ'd if you un-rack your bike without having your helmet on. I leave my helmet on my handle-bars (straps open and spread, so I can put it straight on) so I can't un-rack my bike without putting my helmet on. Same goes for the race belt if I have to wear it during the bike leg – I'll leave it in my helmet (using my sunnies to weight it down a bit).

#### Bike:

- *Shoes*: If you have clip-in shoes, it's a lot safer to keep them on the bike (and not wear them in transition) and slip your feet in whilst riding. Practice getting on/ off your bike and in/ out of your shoes in training, and get your speed up before trying to get your feet into your shoes (to lose less time getting them on).
- *Drafting/ Blocking/ Passing*: All the rules are at <http://www.triathlonqld.com.au/Events/RulesTechInfo.aspx>. There's often a lot of drafting going on during the bike leg as the reduced drag is a fairly significant advantage, and (for some) it's hard not to pass up the opportunity to get in a pack. However, it is dangerous. It's not unusual for one rider to bring down several others if riders are illegally drafting. It's up to you whether the risks of drafting are worth the slight advantage. If you ARE going to draft, be sure to keep an ear/ eye out for draft-busters on motor bikes (which sometimes penalise you – eg. 3-minute penalty), don't back-chat them (as it's a sure way of getting DQ'd) and make sure you do your penalty (or you'll get DQ'd). Also, be sure to let other riders know you're passing them by yelling out (eg. "Passing on your right" or "Stay left").

- *Hazards:* Keep an eye out for hazards (eg. pot-holes, other riders). Particularly if it's been raining, watch out for slippery corners (particularly if the road cambers away) and manhole lids.

T2:

- As for T1, pre-race transition orientation, thinking about what you're about to do (just before coming into transition) and staying relaxed should see you flying through T2. If you only need to wear your race belt and number during the run, leave it between your shoes so you don't leave transition without it (and avoid the risk of being sent back to get it).

T3:

- *Run Start:* Running after a bike ride can be hard – particularly the first few times you do it. Get plenty of practice running off the bike before race day. Particularly at the run start, try to find a good rhythm first before worrying too much about speed.
- *Tempo:* As for all the race, the key is to keep a steady pace. A lot of people fly out of T2 in front of their friends/ family and then reality checks in ... and they drag themselves home.
- *Technique/ Core:* Again, as for everything, don't forget your technique and your core. I find focusing on keeping your core muscles strong makes running (in particular) a lot easier.
- *Fluids:* Keep running through the drink stations (ie. don't stop or slow down too much). If you need to drink, press the plastic cups edges a bit to make a wedge (makes it a lot easier to get water into your mouth).
- *Finish:* Aim to finish a fair distance (eg. 500m+) before the finish, as the adrenalin of the crowds etc will probably kick in and carry you home.

Above all else, have fun !!