

Black Bear Half-Iron Triathlon

1 June 08

John Fischer

I signed up for Black Bear only because it was close by and I noticed on the Paramount triathlon club website that a lot of other races were already closed. Having been focused on a major 2008 goal of qualifying for Boston at Boston, I hadn't done any biking until early May, when I got in 5-6 short bike-run workouts at the fitness center at work. But I had been swimming twice a week since January. For this race, I didn't carb-deprive then carb-load as usual, a mistake I'd pay for during the run.

The Swim (1.2 mi)

Although there was heavy rain the night before, the weather was near-perfect at the start - in the low 60s and sunny. Water temp was around 70, low enough to be wetsuit-legal, and there were only about 5 people in the entire race without wetsuits – poor souls because the water felt cold. Wave after wave took off, and finally my group = wave 9, which was smaller than the previous groups with only about 20 people, was called. It was an in-water start and I took a spot near the middle and right of the pack, which allowed me to stand rather than tread water. At the start, I just tried to avoid the crowd, but at the same time find someone ahead of me to draft. The crowd thinned quickly and I was only bumped a few times. From there it was a matter of staying on course, maintaining reasonable form, and getting it done. It wasn't too long before I reached the big yellow turn-buoy and made my way around it to the next where I made another 90 degree turn, heading back toward the start/finish area. A few people passed me, but I noticed that I was also passing some people, and figured I was doing OK for a pre-geezer, who swims in the guppy lane at swim practice. Near the start/finish area, I almost got faked-out by the turn-buoys for the Sprint-distance race, but got back on track, when I saw everyone ahead going straight and not turning. Finally made the last turn into shore, and didn't look back. As I emerged from the water, my wife yelled "38 minutes", which is a pretty good time compared to previous efforts.

Extracting myself from the wetsuit is always a struggle, and my transition-1 times are always slow. But when I got to my transition spot, there was a young lady standing there talking leisurely, apparently finished racing. So I had the idea to ask her to strip me (of my wetsuit) – which I later learned may be against the rules. She agreed, and I stuffed the suit in my bag, got the helmet, shades and shoes on and took off running with the bike after packing PowerBars in my shirt pockets. To save time, I held my bike gloves in my teeth, figuring I'd put them on while riding.

The Bike 56 mi

This was a 2-loop very hilly course in the Poconos. Although I ride in the Hunterdon County hills all the time, I believe that this was my first race on hilly terrain, so I was unsure how to pace myself. Since I drove the course the night before, I knew that the hills were relentless with few flat spots. That turned out to be a good move because the course itself was a little confusing, but a lot of credit goes to the organizers, CGI Racing, who had the course well-marked with plenty of signs and course marshals. I stayed on my nutrition plan of one PowerBar and one bike-bottle of Accelerade per hour, which in retrospect may have been inadequate. By the end of the first loop, my legs knew they had done some

work, and I started the second loop. As usual, since I am a slow swimmer but a decent cyclist, I passed a lot of people. About halfway through loop#2, there is an out-and-back section beginning with a right turn going into a long tree-covered downhill, where you reach speeds of over 30 mph. About midway down the hill a deer was scrambling to get traction on the blacktop in an attempt to sprint across the road. He crossed within a foot or two in front of the rider ahead of me, and based on my own reaction, I imagined that she must have needed to change her shorts. I slowed and looked carefully at the side of the road (very challenging at over 20 mph) to make sure the rest of the family wasn't following. A second deer came scrambling out two riders ahead of me, and again seemed to pass a foot or so in front of the next rider ahead. It became clear that these were two male deer trying to out-macho each other in a game of chicken, and I kept a careful eye out during the rest of the downhill for more participants, thankfully finding none. After the turn-around, I climbed my way back up the long hill and eventually finished the bike leg. The transition to run went quickly, and I kept my bike gloves on, figuring on pocketing them during the run.

The Run (13.1 mi)

My legs felt horrible starting the run, and I hoped that that was caused by my inadequate bike-run transition training, and that it would wear off. After 2 miles it was better, but not by much and I just plugged along at a slow but steady pace that I knew could get me through the next 11 miles. Like the bike, the run was also a 2-loop course with some hills and shade cover, which was welcome since it was warming up into the mid-70s. I was able to keep my steady plod on the hills and was surprised to actually pass a few younger guys, some of whom were walking. Not surprisingly, I was also being passed, mostly by younger guys, who I figured should have been ahead of me since they started in earlier waves. By the second loop, I had settled in to a maintainable pace and was looking forward to being done.

One part of the course is an out and back along the top of a river dam, with a water stop at each end. While beginning this section of the course, I spotted a tall grey-haired guy ahead of me, who I figured could be in my age group. I was pretty far behind him but not losing any distance to him. As he got to the far end, he stopped to drink at the water stop and I started closing the distance. He took off toward me, and I made a point of checking his age, body-marked on his calf. Sure enough, he was in my group, and I set out to catch him. I rounded the turn-around, grabbing water on the fly but not stopping. Picked up the pace a notch and began to close in. Meanwhile, while passing someone, I asked if my body-marked age was visible, since sometimes it comes off due to sunscreen etc. and was told it was gone. Great – I'm now a stealth geezer. By the other end of the dam, I had made significant progress in closing the gap, and much to my delight, he stopped again for water. I pulled my hat down over my head to conceal my gray hair, and passed him. Not long after, a second guy in my age group passed me, and I couldn't keep up with him as he put distance between us. He was out-of-sight after rounding a turn, but became visible again on a straighter section. Suddenly he slowed and started limping, rubbing his hamstrings, and I was able to catch and pass him – served him right anyway for having the gall to pass me in the first place. Lacking the sportsmanship to avoid taking advantage of his misfortune, I clicked it up another notch or two to discourage him from passing me again. For the rest of the way in, I just tried to motivate myself by imagining those two guys 100 feet behind me trying to hunt me down. They never did, and I crossed the finish line challenging a young muscle-bound guy, hoping we could motivate each

other into a fast finish. He beat me to the line, but we both ran hard and enjoyed the challenge, high-fiving at the end.

While gathering my stuff in the transition area, I ran into the guy with the hamstring problem, and asked him how he did. He told me about his cramping near the end, then asked how I had done. When I told him my time, he mentioned that I had probably gotten an age-group award, since he had taken 4th place and was a few minutes behind me. We checked the results, and much to my surprise, I was 3rd place in the pre-geezer group of only 7 participants. While my overall time wasn't great, I did improve my swim time and transition times over previous efforts and was competitive in my division and in the top half of all males. I learned that just showing up is half the battle, and being a little persistent is probably the other 90% as Yogi might say.

Swim	285/397	38:24	
Bike	128/397	3:14:09	17.2mph
Run	186/397	2:08:15	9:48 min/mile
Total		6:07:52	136/296 Males