

Anaconda Forster 2011

DAY ONE

This year I decided to return to one of my favorite race series, the Anaconda races in Australia. These races combine Swimming, Surf ski paddling, Mountain biking and running to form a real test of Multi discipline racing.

The first race in the 2011 series was held in Forster, several hours north of Sydney and unlike any of the other races in the series is run over two days instead of one.

The line up for race one in the series included last years overall series champion Grant Suckling, former series winner Jarad Kohlar and former Olympic triathlete Simon Thompson to name just a few.

Day one's course started with a 2.1 km swim before a 16km kayak, 15km MTB and finished with an 11.9km run.

As the hooter went and we piled into the water for the opening swim I managed to get some clear space quite quickly and was feeling good. There were several guys disappearing in to the distance quickly but I was with the second group and feeling quite comfortable. I managed to stay with the group right through to the end and exited the water far further forward in the pack than several years ago when I last swam there. Didn't spot any sharks unlike in training (wasn't a real man eating shark, just a carpet shark) so that may have been the reason I wasn't further up – not enough incentive!

Onto the ski and there was very little shore break so the beach exit was very easy and we headed round to the local breakwater that lead us into a huge tidal lake system where we were heading for the far end – luckily with an incoming tide. I pulled in most of the paddlers in front quickly and by the halfway stage was just chasing two remaining paddlers. They'd headed on a very different line to me in what appeared to be a massive detour but I was to find out later they were locals and were following a deep water channel as I fort off the constant bottom drag of kayaking in half a meter of water – despite being three to four kilometers off the shore of the lake.

As we neared the finish I was sitting in second overall about a minute down on the first team, and looking very forward to getting off the ski as my rear and the seat in the ski were not very well paired.

Onto the Mountain bike and although short it was a tough little ride with some sharp up hills and really rough ground for a lot of the ride. I reeled in the top team toward the top of the last major climb and managed to put a small gap on him heading into the final section.

The rain was pelting down by now any thoughts of a quick run were dashed once we headed off the roads after five kilometers and the track disappeared straight into the lake. The first team runner had caught me up and I was able to stick with him for a while but only due to the fact it was impossible to run properly due to all of the clambering over fallen trees and wading through the lake. It was a relief when we finally left the lake behind and started on some more runnable terrain. I did lose sight of the team runner rather quickly though.

Arriving at the finish I'd established a healthy lead on day one, Grant Suckling was in second with unknown (to me anyway) Kris Plain in third. The upset of the day was that Jarad Kholar had abandoned the race after crook guts hit him during the paddle. Olympic Triathlete Simon Thompson was in 4th – I'd been trying to catch him the whole paddle only to discover he'd come out of the water with me in the swim and I'd got away on the paddle leg faster. That would have been far more impressive if he'd done more than ten swims in the eighteen months since he retired!

DAY TWO

The rain was bucketing down and didn't ease up all night. Everyone knew it was going to be a very wet and slow course today.

The second day consisted of a 1.9 km swim, 16km run, 30 km MTB, 13 km paddle and a 3km run to finish.

The swim on day two is one of the best swims I've done (don't confuse that for one of the fastest swims I've done). I was milling around with a few others when all of a sudden the hooter sounded with no warning and we were off – trying desperately to put my goggles on while running into the surf. There was some good surf coming into the beach and so ducking under the breaking waves was critical to avoid being washed back into the beach before we headed parallel and then surfed back into the far end of the beach. It was then back out into some surging currents where for the longest time I felt like I was swimming on the spot staring at the same piece of reef. Once released from that it was around a rocky headland and into the far end of the next beach.

Again I was right with Simon Thompson and together we set off on the run keeping each other at an honest pace. The first couple of kilometers are along a beach before heading onto a variety of trails. I managed to slip away from Simon after several more kilometers and settle into a comfortable rhythm. The run went by amazingly fast and by the end I was up into overall second again but with far fewer hopes of seeing the first team than the day before.

Onto the Mountain Bike and almost immediately it was onto slippery muddy trails where there often seemed to be more water than track. Progress was painfully slow but we soon got some respite with some faster 4x4 road sections. I was just getting comfortable with that and anticipating a finishing time for the bike when the markers pointed us back off the main track and onto a minor side

trail system. This was OK, slower but not too bad but soon the terrain changed again and the track literally disappeared below the water as the nearby rivers flooded the area. I lost count of how many times I went flying over the handlebars as I hit pockets of water far deeper than anticipated – I think at one stage it happened in three consecutive puddles. Just when I thought it couldn't get any wetter we had to wade several hundred meters through waist to chest deep water before finding the track again on the far side. My main concern was not encountering any snakes that had been washed out of their hiding places!

Finally at the end of the ride – another major bike overhaul now due and it was onto the last major section for the race. I had no idea where the other competitors were in relation to me so it was head down and keep some pressure on for the last 13 kilometers of paddling. Fortunately we again had a following tide and the kilometers ticked off quickly. With only a few kilometers to go we emerged from a channel at the bridge connecting Forster with Tuncurry and a swift tide was sucking all the remaining water out. I imagine only the first few paddlers made it across before it turned into a portage in places. It was certainly hard paddling back into it for the final three kilometers to the final transition.

With the end in sight I enjoyed the last run back to the main beach in Forster and a successful start to the series for me.

Behind me Grant Suckling narrowly lead home Simon Thompson for 2nd and 3rd for the day with Kris Plain in 4th for the day but just holding onto 3rd overall from the two days combined results.

I'm looking forward to a quieter few weeks now but it has certainly been a fun summer.

Thanks to all of our sponsors who make it possible for Elina and I to get to all the races, especially SUBWAY® Restaurants our major sponsor and also to Kelanbri Apartments for the accommodation, Jarad Kholar at Peak Adventure for the loan of a surf ski, and Rapid Ascent for there help in getting to the race.

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