



ZincMan Goes For An Upgrade/Ironman Lanzarote 2011

It wasn't an auspicious start to RACE PREPARATIONS. Wednesday morning saw me down at the beach soon after 7am to make sure that the tsunami I'd dreamed about wasn't about to hit. All was calm. I sank into the water and began a loop of the race swim.

Nobody had mentioned 'The Abyss'. The sea was really rough in March when we'd gone down to recce the swim, and I was too busy trying not to drown to even notice it. Wednesday 18th May gave me *something else to worry about*. I was in a good stroke rhythm, and happily putting to bed all my 'sea' worries, when out of the blue ... came a much darker blue and my sea world went dizzy. From swimming through clear water with the ripples of the sandy seabed not far below me, to ... absolutely nothing. Vertigo hit. Clear water – but so deep now, I couldn't see anything, so my mind started seeing things for me. I was following the line of buoys and a rope was stretching at an angle away from it. It was, of course, a shark with hideously evil eyes. Even when I had convinced myself it was a rope after all, I still had to swim past quickly, in case it morphed into a man-eating shark whilst I was at it.

I had to work hard to control my breathing.

Finally – finally - the loop was done. I stood up and started undoing my wetsuit. Sharpness clamped onto the top of my left foot, followed by a very firm sucker action. I yelped and started thrashing. A 6 inch long black fish was locked onto me, until I managed to kick it off. "I've been bitten by a fish", I was exclaiming to everybody. Nobody took a blind bit of notice ... until they saw the teeth marks. "Don't tell Sarah", someone muttered, "she'll not get in again".

Next day, I *had* to get in again. I had new demons to exorcise ...

I'd texted Johanna (mother of William and his Fund) about my escapades, to see if she had any bravery ideas. Wills had loved swimming, and the rest of the family decided that my fish 'hicky' was "a kiss from the sea" ... and as it was a Black Fish, it was decreed that I'd been 'kissed for luck' and all would be well. So, with the children rooting for me, I got back in ... with the Kona triathlete and coach, Steven Lord, beside me for a bit of professional therapy. This time, the rope

looked like a rope, but 'The Abyss' was still ... 'abyssie'. Taking a cue from Wills, I let all the little fishes 'talk to me', whilst I tried to distract myself from the certain knowledge that at least one of them would 'get me'.

I survived – I suspect because I was now an honorary BlackFish, and one of them ...

Someone mentioned the race numbers. "No, mine's 709". Wrong again Helen. *How on earth can you get your own race number wrong?* Multiple texts later, I'd managed to get the message across to everyone back in Blighty, that I wasn't 709 after all, and not to follow that competitor (unless they were faster than me) but to key in 137. "We know, we already checked" Mmm, I thought I had too.

Wind check? Damn that forecast. No chance it was going to be light winds like last year. Nothing to do except accept that it was going to be a windy ol' Lanza day – and therefore a long one.

Race Day dawned. Well, in truth, it arrived *way, way* before dawn. I fuffed, and worried, created a few more demons in my head that weren't there the day before, dressed, changed my mind about my kit (????), changed my kit (even more ?????????), re-dressed and before you can say 'fish hicky' we were all stood at the start.

The Butla, Jez, Paula and John were somewhere at the front behind the pros, and the rest of us – Kate, Libby, Paul, Frazboy and me – were further back. Turns out, I wasn't far enough back. Entering the water 1 minute after the klaxon sounded, I started my Ironman Lanzarote Day Out.

The field was about 1000 smaller than Austria, but the swim entry was much, much narrower. I managed to - pretty much - stay out of trouble at IM Austria, but this 'washing machine' effect was landing me too many blows, not enough space to swim in, and generally increasing water entry through my mouth.

Trying to stay calm, I lengthened my stroke. No Zen-zone there. Breaststroke? Some were managing it, so why couldn't I get enough arm/leg room? Things were so bad, I didn't even notice 'The Abyss'. I guess 10 to 15 minutes into the race, unable to breathe, and now in a complete panic, I turned sharp left, and doggy-paddled straight across about 6 swimmers, heading for the rescue of the line of buoys. "What the ****", I heard ... I wanted to apologise but I was too busy trying not to drown.

Quite how long I was there, I have no idea. I just hung onto a wonderfully *there*, slimy seaweed-covered rope (that was never ever going to turn into a shark) and tried to breathe. *'It can't be game over already. I can't be hauled out here. All that work. All that recovery. All those people saying I shouldn't be doing it ...'* I can't remember letting go, but whenever it was, it was my introduction to drafting off someone's feet. It was slower than I would normally swim, but I didn't care. All I was trying to do was keep going. Easy strokes, easy breathing, easy strokes, easy breathing. I left those feet and found some slightly faster ones. Easy strokes, easy breathing. 'OK – there's the turning buoy. Doggy paddle round that, and you're heading back home'. I remembered that Steven Lord had said 'finish the stroke, push the water behind you, make your triceps hurt, you won't need them for the rest of the day' ... so, as a very helpful distraction, I spent the rest of the loop trying a new swim technique whilst looking at all the fishes sucking on

the sandy sea bed. Rather there than my foot. Running out to the turning cone on the beach, I glanced at my watch ... 36 minutes???? Well, that would make a PB!? GO GIRL – HIT THAT



WATER AGAIN, AND DON'T STAND FOR ANY NONSENSE. High 5 to Brian who was stretched out at the front of the spectators – YES! All was well with the world ☺

“Concentrate”, he yelled ... déjà vu, I thought ...

The second loop was still quite congested heading out to 'The Abyss', but manageable. Nothing was going to stop me now – not even the waves that had started to build, along with the wind. Still had to doggy-paddle round the buoys (really need to sort that out before the next IM – sooooo unprofessional. Bit like hanging off the ropes for dear life!), and had to think hard of *stuff* to avoid thinking of the awful salt-mouth I was developing. Ho hum – the life of an Ironman age-grouper ...

And, as if by magic, THE END appeared. I was still swimming, but I could see other wetsuit legs upright. Figuring I could swim faster than I could wade, I carried on until my fingertips were scrapping sand (didn't want another chunk of me removed by the peckish sea-life) and then hauled myself out. Hitting the Garmin on the hoof, I clocked 1:16 ... and gave myself a huge smile. Massive, massive PB ... completely beyond general expectations, never mind what it might have been on the day given my paralysing anxiety attack. I later discovered my swim time was 3 minutes slower, so goodness knows where the timing mat was – probably *after* the fresh water shower that I stopped and undressed under! Damn and blast it!

Learning from the debacle that was my Austrian T1, I collected the *CORRECT* bag and dashed to the tent. It was carnage. Water and sand absolutely everywhere. Later I learned that both Paula and the Butla had taken tumbles in the general mess of it all, and was more surprised that more of us hadn't come a cropper. Kate and Libby were already there, dressed, organised and getting plastered with sun-cream, ready for the off. Post-Austria, I had decided that a kit change in either transition wasn't an option, but unfortunately my bum-conditioning for completing 112 miles in tri shorts got interrupted by the 2 surgeries. So despite struggling out of my cozzie, and into my bib shorts as quickly as I could, my T1 time could hardly be classed as slick. Mmmm – it was ... well, slower than 10 minutes, but faster than 20. And that's all I'm admitting to.

Portaloo – where are you – portaloo? Oh no – now Abba was stuck in my head.



With the sand and water everywhere, I put my cycling shoes on in the tent and dashed out. A HUGE ascent was required to get off the beach and up onto the promenade where all the bikes were racked ... running on my Speedplay 'coffee cups', I raced up. The spectators were appreciative of this athletic display and their roars kept me shifting. Miss Austria was waiting where I'd left her – and Brian was there too, marking the spot. I hit the 'ON' button of my Garmin Edge and took the coffee cups off my cleats. Brian yelled to give them to him – so I did – only in my excitement, more in a 'chucking', rather than 'giving' kind of way, over the barrier and dangerously towards the buggy innocently parked behind him. Wide-eyed with mortification, and to the strains of Brian's 'Concentrate!' I trotted off to begin stage 2 of my Ironman Lanzarote Day Out.

The crowd were awesome. Huge cheers – endlessly.

And of course, I waved to each one. Rude not to. The route took us along the beach front, along the promenade, past the shops and the restaurants and more shops and more restaurants. And so I waved and waved and waved ... for several miles I think. And I realised why in Austria I was hollering 'Hola' to everybody ... I had been practicing for Lanzarote ☺

It was already quite windy, even with the protection of the town around me, and so handling the bike with one hand whilst waving to everybody had become quite a task. I needed to eat, to drink and to go the loo – again – very badly. This was becoming 'déjà vu' in too many ways.

The race brief had said toilets at every aid station, so I told my guts to shut up for the next 20km whilst I got me and Miss Austria up the long grind to Yaiza I knew so well. I stuck to my race plan (helpfully honed by Rich Stock's input) and rode steadily, trying to stay focussed on my reward of finally being able to drop my bib shorts and feel 'relieved'. My goodness, it was a long 20km ...

Past the ranch on the right, and I'm nearly there. My digestive system is thrilled with the anticipation of it all. I veer off the road and towards the support crew, shouting "Toiletten?" repeatedly (not sure of 'toilet' in Spanish, so have gone for German instead). This does not result in the response I'm after. Quizzical faces stare blankly back at me, "Que?" they say. I clearly look desperate, as after a few more "Toiletten?" and "Toilet?" one chap seems to twig and sweeps his hand in the direction of the car park. "Car", he says. Interesting, I thought ... how did they manage to put a portaloos inside a car? He holds my bike and my legs wobble in the direction of their expansive gestures. Not seeing any portaloos in any car, I look back at them ... "Si, si, car" ... Oh, good grief, he means 'behind the cars' ... but there aren't that many. The biggest seems to be

a people carrier parked parallel to the road. Too far along it, away from everybody, makes me visible to the cyclists still climbing slowly towards the aid station. I shuffle along a bit until I can't be seen from that angle, and too late, realise that what I've started, is right in front of the passenger door. To cap it all, I've travelled light, figuring that tissues are a waste of time. Ironman is far from glamorous, and nose contents are evacuated via the tried and tested (and disgusting, but practical) violent 'snot' method. In the absence of the expected loo paper in the expected portalo, I improvised with an empty Lance Armstrong Honey Stinger Waffle packet. I wouldn't recommend it. On finishing the race, first aid was required in the form of some very necessary Aloe Vera gel. Feeling physically better, but emotionally mortified, I 'hid' my 'message' under a cairn of 4 lumps of volcanic lava that I found nearby, hoping that the 'front passenger' to the people carrier didn't knock them as he/she mounted into the vehicle. On reflection, the foresight to pack a mini Union Jack on a cocktail stick would have finished the effect off nicely. Not making eye contact with the chap holding my bike, I clambered on and made off – wishing I could have escaped faster, but humiliatingly, the gradient was still quite taxing ...

Ah well – the fact that it's a single loop means I won't be revisiting that location any time soon ... even if I will find it difficult to forget it ...



El Golfo was next on the menu. Already, streams of competitors were coming back UP the long, slow, rough-surfaced gradient that I was currently storming down, using as big a gear as my little legs could manage. Never mind the hard work to come, just negotiating the wind-blasted, pointless 'extra loop' was the first battle, and I amused myself my counting those I passed. Mmmm, didn't do much of that at all in Austria, so I *have* gotten better ... I lost count so many times (there's a lot to do when you're riding your bike for the day ... prayers to the kind saint of happy tyres and tubes ... drinks every 20 minutes ... a waffle every 45 minutes ... a chew thrown in to top up the waffle every now and then ... a salt tablet on the hour ... keeping mindful of the

drafting regs ...) but I'm sure that by the time I reached the long 6km climb to the top of Fire Mountain, I had a good 40-odd 'scalps'. Not bad for an old bird ☺

UN-FLIPPIN-BELIEVABLE! I needed the loo – AGAIN!!! I pushed the descent off Fire Mountain as much as I could, given the wind conditions required me to cling on for dear life, and hoped I could hang on until the aid station coming up at Tinajo. This little village holds no happy memories now – during the training camp week in March, the little bar owner afforded us no hospitality and Kate nearly came a cropper at the main road junction ... now, requests for 'TOILET' were met with more

expansive hand sweeps encompassing the car park ... what IS IT with these Spaniards and their car/ablution habits?! Now clinging on in more ways than you can imagine, I headed off on the long descent towards La Santa ... with a cunning plan in mind.

I parked Miss Austria outside the lovely restaurant we went back to only a few days ago ... conveniently situated right on the course. "Do you remember me?" I shrieked. "Yes, of course" (!) replied our waiter. "Can I use your loo, please?" I was already shoeless and down the stairs whilst he was sorting his reply out. Another Ironman déjà vu ... porcelain fittings, soap, hand towels, nice fragrance ... I could have been by the lake in Austria ... the relief was the same – complete and utter. I left to roars of approval from the diners ... on both sides of the street ... and if I could speak Spanish, I'm sure I would have heard the sing-song giggles of 'we-know-what-you-were-do-ing'!

Next leg ... to Famara ... check out the seaside, turn right and brace yourself.

Crosswind! Nothing too awful – steady, so manageable (there was a clue here, but I missed it. At the time, it was probably just as well). Water, salt, chews, waffle ... house-keeping done, now just the long grind up the incline to the roundabout. I kept myself amused by starting to compose my race report, thinking of everyone at home who would end up, after all, having to wade through yet another missive about my explosive gastric system. They'll have to be a twist next time, or it'll become too predictable.

There were a few people by the roadside – I yelled "Hola" to them, more to entertain them than myself ... it's a bit desolate there, and it was brave of them to choose that boring, long, exposed road to stand and watch Mmm, well that describes 99% of the island then! But finally, I reached the roundabout, marked by Frazboy's support contingent waving a huge banner. "Hola", I yelled to them, and nearly fell off as I took one hand off the controls to wave at them whilst simultaneously being buffeted by a force nine gale straight in my face. Something like "Whumpphh" came out of my mouth, and the Swiss guy just over-taking me exclaimed "who shut the door in my face?" The wind was full on ... *all the way up to Teguisse, and then up Haria and then up Mirador ...* all I can remember thinking was "will I ever get there?"

There wasn't much else to remember for ages. Just the wind, and the climb, and the wind, and the climb. I called upon all the happy memories I could think of to distract me and keep my legs circling. I tried to conjure up in my mind all the lovely comments people had made when they'd put their hard-earned cash in the Williams Fund pot; I looked at the bits of 'the mother island' on my bracelet bought for me by my sons; I thought of the Butla and laughed as the Garmin showed 7.5 mph as I fought to not get sent back down the slopes of the volcano – "SMASH IT", he'd be saying; I wondered where Kate and Libby were and if the girls back home were planning any hill climbs this weekend; I laughed as I remembered a guy who'd told us about his IM Lanzarote adventures ... he'd said that afterwards any UK wind would be a breeze and any UK hill, a slope ... turned out, he *hadn't actually done IM Lanza, but he was right anyway!!*

And then, in the midst of my daydreaming reverie, there was the pretty village of Teguisse, and water, for which I was desperate, having run out just after Famara (?? Very bad planning!!). I started frantically getting empty bottles ready to chuck 'basketball style' into the big 'empties'

bins, riding along in the wind, with one empty bottle held in my mouth, another in one hand, trying to negotiate the roundabout with the other hand, and a familiar voice yells "CONCENTRATE"!! My wonderful Brian was there, as always, just when I need him, reminding me to keep my hands on the controls, and stay upright on the bike ... it's as if it's meant to be, isn't it? "Kate and Libby are just ahead", he shouts from his moped (how cool is he?) "keep going" ... eh? Like I'm gonna stop!

Reinvigorated by this unexpected encounter, as well as by the water rehydrating my parched throat, I truck on. I can see how high I have to climb ... the windmills are marking the destination ... and boy are they spinning today! The lights will be bright in Porta Blanca this evening, given the welly those windmills are getting! I can see Kate ahead ... she'll re-pass me on the downhill (I'm such a wuss on the descents), and it's great to see another friendly face. How many hours of up can there be in total? 4? 5? Maybe even more? Still haven't downloaded the Garmin ... I do remember seeing 5.5mph whilst giving it everything ...

Finally, I am in sight of the peak of Mirador del Rio and the furthest point away from the start. I'm almost on my way back home. I am thrilled. Even remembering it now as I type, I've gone all goose-bumpy. And the views ... Jez was right ... incredible. Picturesque coastline and the most turquoise sea I've ever seen out to the left, and rugged, brutal volcanic peaks to the right, with dark seas beyond. It was breath taking. I was cycling past an Italian who was being 'escorted' by a couple of Italian cyclist pals – he seemed to be in not a very good place, but even so, we all managed an appreciative "Bella" (or something similar) to mark the outstanding beauty of the occasion. If I hadn't been racing, it would most definitely have been a photo opportunity. As it was, I braced myself for the descent down one of the worst surfaces I had (so far) been on ... I knew it from the training camp, and took it a little slower this time. I still couldn't focus – there was so much vibration that the ground ahead was just a blur. I hung on until the 200m was over, praying that Miss Austria would survive the onslaught, and when I finally had control, opened the sweetie Kate had given me to have when I'd completed all the scary descending. Yum – chewy toffee coated in dark choc – yes, VERY Ironman!

Now for the bit that others seemed to hate, and yet I didn't have an issue with – the long drag to Arrieta on the main road. I settled down on the extensions and prepared for more hours of self-entertainment – but actually got entertained by the hustle and tussle of the other competitors along that stretch. Taff was there – we passed each other a couple of times – a lovely Danish lass called Stime – we yo-yo'd the lead several times too ... and then, something else ... a whining, screaming moped engine, being thrashed by big Brian, into wind! He passed by slowly - I thought, so we could exchange a few words. I later discovered it was because the engine was so small it was all it could manage with Brian's weight against the wind! "You're doing great darling ... CONCENTRATE"!!!!!! Love 'im!

The race organiser, Kenneth, had warned us about the next stretch. 3km of donkey track to Nazaret. Permanent bike mechanics would be there to help. Blimey – how bad could it be?

I HAVE NEVER IN MY LIFE BEEN ON A ROAD SO BADLY SURFACED, SO BADLY POT-HOLED, SO ... MIS-REPRESENTED BY EVEN BEING LABELLED A ROAD. I rattled, almost as much as Miss Austria

rattled. I had to keep my mouth open so there was no danger of biting my tongue or chipping my teeth. Never mind the lack of surface on the 'road', there was carnage *everywhere* ... water bottles, water bottle *cages*, rear-mounted hydration systems in pieces, tubes, tubs, gels, bars, you name it – the 'road' had gained it. My sense of humour vanished through open teeth! I just wanted it to end and I wanted to be HOME. It was the longest 3km I can ever remember, and never ever want to repeat.

A lovely British family were parked close to a junction ... "You're nearly there – you've nearly finished this stupid road", they yelled. Thank God, I thought, nearly home ... mmmmm – thought too soon. There turned out to *still* be a helluva lot of climbing to do, before 'nearly home' became a remote possibility ... OK – this was the time to delve into all the love and support emanating from 'proper back home' ... "send me your energy guys – mines all drying up in this howling wind up this blasted never-ending mountain called Lanzarote". My tummy felt really bad and I was having trouble eating and drinking, although I forced myself to take 3 gulps of water every 20 minutes. It wasn't bad nausea like Austria, more background, but my tummy felt huge and distended and kept biting at me with griping pains. I needed the loo again (probably encouraged by the vibration massage it had received down the donkey track), and another battle to find facilities was one I just didn't have the energy for now. I'd have been happy with a bush, for goodness sake. There weren't any trees, never mind bushes. There weren't even any decent sized fences ... just Lanzarote-sized pint-pot ones, guarding vines in sunken planting holes. Absolute ablutionary disaster.

Not sure how long that energy-sapping last climb lasted. I passed Stime again and we cheered each other along. And finally, I recognised the turn onto the final 'donkey track' – which actually had a surface better than most UK roads today! I got a bit carried away ... the road emerged just above the hotel we were staying in, and in my head I had clearly positioned T2 there. "NO NO – Links, links, lift, lift!!!" I heard, as a Spanish policeman was frantically indicating I should continue round the roundabout. Oh – not home quite yet then! Down that road, along that bit, up the other FOR GOODNESS SAKE ... WHERE IS THE END, **AND WHERE ARE THE LOOS??????**

My Garmin was telling me it should have been all over ... and hurrah ... **it is now! 7 hours and 41 minutes of volcanic drama.** Some nice chap took Miss Austria (I gave her a quick 'thank you' pat before I let her go) – didn't get that kind of service in Austria! – and off I shuffled trying to hold tummy and legs together and make it to the loos in T2. The helpful marshaller in the girl's section of T2 waved to the corner of the tent at the inevitable (and first) question. It didn't make sense, so I hesitated and then decided to start changing into my tri shorts first. (I was – after all – *trying* to have a fast transition!). Then Stime came in, gabbled confidently in some other language, and proceeded to squat in the corner for a piddle. Can that be what the lady was saying? The loo is The Corner Of The Tent????? Does Ironman humiliation stoop much lower than this (it will ...)? With no energy to be proud, I squatted just far enough away from where Stime had been to be making contact with dry ground. I hadn't taken account of the tilt of the land though. Then, what with trying to dodge her river, whilst keeping an eye on my current one, I ended up paddling my toe socks in everybody's piddle. Argh – SOD IT ... well and truly ... and then straight into my beautifully clean (and instantly not) pink Bikila Fivefingers.

Right – ‘7 months pregnant distended belly or not, adios T2’ – I strapped Wills’ Penguin onto my race belt, and I was off. Past all the racked bikes, up to the beginning of the run course and straight into the next-door portaloo. Wasn’t sure which end to attend to first. I felt so sorry for any spectators stupid enough to position themselves so close to the loos – but there were some! Some time later I emerged – and with an *almost* flat (you don’t see your six-pack until the morning *after* Ironman!) stomach ☺ My brave trick, after much gagging of some gel-tasting fluid, resulting in no relief whatsoever? Finger down throat – resulting in the GUINNESS WORLD RECORD OF LOUDEST AND LONGEST BURPS X 3!

So finally – after a disappointingly slow, but incredibly successful T2 of 18 minutes (*still* need to learn how to burp!) – I was ready ... to run a marathon!

The crowds were wonderful – well, they would be ... sat in the numerous bars and cafes along the promenade! They had sun, sea, sangria AND plenty of interesting sights to keep them occupied – athletes of all sizes, shapes, ages and nationalities running, walking, shuffling, limping along their holiday resort ... ignoring ice-cream stalls and friendly offers of ‘half a lager’, opting instead for a variety of ‘healthy’ options ... water, flat coke, Gatorade, ¼ oranges, power bars. It was a bizarre marathon ... and much more fun than Austria!

I lasted til the *next* portaloo! A whole 2km without dropping my tri shorts! Proud of myself, I trucked on. Kate and I had planned this, and I wasn’t about to duck away from the challenge. Kate had already passed me, I couldn’t stay with her, but we had a plan. Run the whole marathon, but walk through each aid station in order to take on fluid and nutrition. In my case – run, walk the aid station, and use any (and every) loo that didn’t require diverting off-route. My Ironman stooped to the humiliation of retching by the promenade wall – only once. All other incapacitations were privately dealt within their wonderful portalooos (all still there – AND OPEN – AND APPARENTLY USABLE - the following day! I suspect that the rest of the island had had to go without, because the resort of Porto del Carmen had hogged them all!).

I could see other runners passing me, or coming towards me, with different coloured wristbands on – this was clearly the ‘lap system’, which afforded me endless hours of entertainment whilst I figured it all out. For the present though, I was bandless and therefore with a long way to go ... and the wind was still a-blowin’ ... seeing Paula and the Butla looking good were the only high points I remember on that first outbound leg.

I past the ‘short lap’ turning point, but as instructed (being clearly bandless), I ran straight on ... round the corner of the airfield and straight into a faceful of even more wind. Deep joy. I’m still trying to work it out, but there must have been another 6km of that before the end of the first stretch of lap one was over. But a milestone is a milestone, no matter how small the triumph, and this was an important one, as I would never see this landmark again on my Lanzarote Ironman journey. I bade ta-ta to Turn One and headed back to the resort.

A very loud “HEEEELLEN!!!!” caught my attention once back in amongst the bars and ... bars of Porto del Carmen. Steven Lord – a long lad in anyone’s language – was waving what seemed like octopus arms, hands and legs at me ... no wonder he’s such a fast swimmer! Somehow in all the commotion, he managed to get across to me that I’d meet Roz (hope I remembered that right!) on

the course – the lady he'd written to me about, who'd won the prize of a running lesson with me. It was wonderful to see his friendly face, and the encounter had me flying into town – at - ooohh - 6mph!!! Faster than when I was on the bike climbing up the volcanoes into a head wind ☺

It got even better and my smiles got even broader. The support was from everywhere – Paula and John's support crews were yelling and screaming from one side, then I was spotted by The Big FireCrew Gang along for Jez, Kate, Paul, Libby and Dave ... and then – I could see my Brian, and my heart lifted. The crowds and the barriers funnelled me in, on a slight downhill (yum!) and I could see the turn, marking the end of the first half marathon. What a moment! I was only halfway there, but I was almost delirious with happiness. What was left was biteable and chewable in 4 manageable chunks. I was going to make it. I was going to be a Lanzarote Ironman, and nobody was ever going to be able to say I'd chosen an 'easy' option!



First though, I could see a girl holding stretched open a large, yellow, knitted hair band and pointing it at me.

In my excitement I only slowly realised I had to run, and aim my hand through the hole, committing my trophy to my left wrist before 'chucking a U-ie' round the turning cone. I tell you – the acrobatics you need to perform to accomplish these things ... after that many hours on the go without a break, multi-tasking was nearly impossible!

But now I was running away from the finish for the penultimate time – back past my Brian who ran with me for a few yards "are you OK sweet?" "a bit ickie, but OK" I smiled. It was wonderful to see him again, after only a few minutes! Then there were the roars from The Big FireCrew Gang, then more from the Paula/John contingent ... then finally, the biggest "HEEELLLLLLEN" from Steven as I passed the last of the main drag of bars. I could see Kate running towards me, looking as if she'd just been for a lesson with a really good running coach – perfect technique! We high 5'd and ran on – life was good.

Unbelievably quickly, it was my turn to head back for my next trophy and a bit of relief from the head wind. This time, I DID meet the girl who's won a running lesson with me ... only she was about to finish!! The crowds in town seemed to be even bigger this time, with more and more competitors joining in the yelling, sporting tasty big Ironman Lanzarote medals around their necks ... The



Butla, Paula and Jez were done and grinning from ear to ear, looking fresh as daisies – I think I was clapping them as much as they were cheering for me.

I was ready this time. I had my arm prepared, my gaze was fixed, I was locked on. I 'took' my blue knitted wristband so well, and so accurately, it only stopped when it hit my armpit. I chucked that U-ie so tight, I was on that last 6km outbound leg before they'd finished calling my name. The next time I would see all these lovely, supportive, happy faces would be when I was *coming home*.

I maintained my rhythm of run, walk the aid stations, swill some flat coke around my mouth before spitting it out (I'd read somewhere that even if you don't swallow, 30 seconds of 'swill' was enough to get some energy into the blood stream ... and I was still struggling to get any calories in), dive into a loo if necessary, back to steady running. Towards the end of the outbound leg, I could see Kate coming towards me – big grins, high 5s and an "I'm so proud of you", and I was off towards the airport and she was off to finish.



I continued to the turn-round point and high-5'd all the marshallers who'd seen me pass so many times already. "I'll never see you again – thank you!!" I yelled. Now there was no stopping me. Loos could wait, water could wait, and calories could wait. With only 6km to go, the sun long gone and the stars already out, all I needed to do was run – run as well as I could until I didn't have to run any more. Almost the entire 6km, my heart was in my throat, the tears burned the back of my eyes and I was thanking everybody who was still out on the course clapping the efforts of the competitors. I'd heard the last few miles can be emotional in Ironman – I didn't feel it in Austria - I think I must have been getting a double dose in Lanzarote because it was the best 6km of my life. I clapped, thanked and said my 'ciaos' to all the marvellous staff at each aid station and then, unbelievably, I could see the big lights and hear the big noise of the finish line. Passing a proud Brian, and yelling and screaming "I've done it, I've done it", I did what I'd dreamed of doing, and 'aeroplaned' down the finishing straight, catching as many outstretched hands and making eye contact with as many happy faces as I could – before I **CROSSED THE FINISH LINE AND GRABBED THE BANNER**. The glamorous ladies whose job it was to hold the banner were clearly quite protective of it, because it was a bit of a battle to get hold of it. But obviously I won, because I'm a Lanzarote Ironman, and here it is ...



Kenneth – the world famous owner and organiser of Ironman Lanzarote was there to shake my hand, and poor chap, he was forced into a bear-hug by a 40-something crazed, sweaty madwoman, who clearly thought she'd won. But I got a picture with him ... and apparently, *that's a result!*

Sweaty hugs with Jez and Kate, who'd finished a few minutes earlier ('Pressed 'n' proud!), and then a (probably stinky) kiss through the wire holes in the barrier with my wonderful Brian, who'd had a very long day dashing around trying to see all of us as many times as he could.

So, after a bit of a journey to even get to the start, and with the help of some lovely friends raising a lot more money for Williams Fund (that penguin has seen some action!), I completed Ironman Lanzarote

– the hardest Ironman in the world – 41 minutes faster than I managed in Austria.

My stats:

Swim 1:19:29 (85th lady)

T1 13:26

Bike 7:41:18 (71st lady)

T2 17:54

Run 4:55:27 (72nd lady)

Total Time: 14 hrs 27 min 33 sec.

Total loo stops: 7.

Result? A 24 hour six-pack the next morning – as predicted ☺