

## **Vitruvian 2019 - Gavin Smith**

I've had an idea for a few years that in the year I turned 40 I wanted to set myself a challenge that would really test me - some might call it a mid life crisis!

Whilst I'd been a keen (albeit distinctly average) cyclist for a number of years, a pure cycling challenge just didn't appeal and so I soon landed on the idea of giving triathlon a go. Having never swam open water and not having done any running since school cross country, that certainly seemed to tick the challenging box!

And so my tri journey started - a super sprint tri at Hever in 2016 followed by an Olympic a year later and I well and truly had the triathlon bug.

The question then was what to do in my 40th year - 2019. There was only really one option. I considered a full iron man for about 5 seconds but quickly realised that was completely unrealistic (for now at least...) - a half iron was the perfect challenge; challenging enough to require serious dedication and training but also something I could - with a bit of imagination - visualise achieving.

So the final thing to decide was which one to go for. Cotswolds was the obvious choice as a big club event and apparently a very beginner friendly course, however by the time I'd 100% decided to go for it I'd missed my chance as it was fully booked.

After a bit of Google research I quickly settled on the Vitruvian instead. It had a few things that appealed but the big selling points were a flat run and a September start date giving me the whole summer to train.

I won't bore with details of training but I found a 6 month plan on the internet which followed a nice pattern of roughly 3 1 hour sessions a week plus 1 big session. This suited me and I managed to stick to it quite well on the whole, with only 1 or 2 weeks being completely ruined by work getting in the way.

And so the big day finally arrived, Saturday 14 September! I decided to camp at Rutland water the night before which meant I could avoid rushing around in the morning and get registered and racked up the night before. Sleep was a bit broken - including a dream where I missed the start of the race(!) - but I woke up around 4.30am ready to go.

A large pot of instant porridge later I made my way over to the start line with a mixture of nerves and excitement, although probably mainly nerves!

An absolutely stunning sunset started to develop with a gorgeous pink sky developing over the dam of the lake - a good sign for a Trisurrey competitor surely!

I was in the second wave of starters so we gathered on the side of the lake to watch the ladies in the first wave set off.

Almost as soon as the ladies started people were surprised that they seemed to be heading too far right, was the first buoy not the one I had thought? No, a marshall confirmed that they were too far right - looked like spotting was going to be tricky!

Then it was our turn. It was a beach start but we were allowed a few minutes in the water first to warm up. The water felt good and much warmer than the 16.5 degrees suggested, however the tricky spotting soon became apparent once in the water. The buoy that had been easy to see from the shore was now virtually invisible due to the low sun and mist coming off the lake. Oh well I'm not going to be near the front so I'll just have to hope the leaders get the direction right and I'll follow!!!

Right; back out the water ready for the start. I found a spot towards the back but more in the middle than I would have ideally liked, but on a relatively small beach it wasn't going to get much better so it would have to do.

We're off....into the water....Christ this is busy! Lots of contact and no personal space - arrrggh, I'm not liking this. No! Need to get a grip....just breath and relax... that's better - mini panic over, I begin to settle into my stroke.

I take up a position just off the feet of another swimmer of similar pace and enjoy his slipstream for a while. Quick look up - no can't see the buoy but the canoes seem well to our right which I take as a good sign that we're broadly on course.

All going well when THWACK a stray arm smacks me in the face! Luckily my goggles stay on and if anything have now been stuck tighter to my face! A couple of strokes of breaststroke to regain my composure and back into it again.

Phew, there's the buoy, not too far and looking well positioned to avoid being in the melee going tight round it. Round I go - first mini land mark achieved - time to start enjoying this beautiful morning swim!

Starting to get near the end of the first lap now. We need to head back to the beach cross a short jetty and get back in. I'm grateful for the hand of a volunteer to help me out and manage to grab a quick look at my watch. 20 mins in and just over 1,000m, yep happy with that - looks like the swims going to be slightly over the advertised 1,900 probably mainly to me taking a wide line.

Back in we go. The field is quite thinned out now but still plenty of people around me and I'm mostly relying on other swimmers for direction as I'm still struggling to pick out the buoys. Not ideal but it seems to be working ok. The second lap passes off without too much incident and I'm feeling good as I spot the beach again and cover the last 100m or so to finish.

My legs are a little wobbly as I get out the water but I'm pleased to have got through the swim unscathed and in a respectable time - around 2,100m covered in 42 mins.

I take my time in transition, it's important I make sure my feet are properly dry - memories of awful blisters at Hever- and I don't forget my food for the ride. T1 is about 5 mins but I'm fine with that. Slow jog to the mount line with my bike and I'm off again.

I don't know too much about the bike course other than it's got a modest climb in it towards the start of the first lap. I push out at a steady pace but trying not to exert myself - my main aim for the ride is to save my legs for the run (which is always going to be my weakest leg) but to try and put in a solid average of around 26 km/h.

The course turns out to be relatively fast; by the time I reach the Rutland ripple climb my average is over 28 km/h and I'm enjoying myself. I stick my bike in an easy gear and amble up the climb picking off a few larger riders - once at the top there's a lovely long gradual downhill that lasts a good few km, I make good time but one or two of those larger riders I passed on the climb soon come thundering past me.

It's a two lap race and I'm pleased to complete the first lap in almost bang on 1 hrs 30 mins. Looks like my target of 26 km/h average was too cautious and so I aim to keep it at around 27 km/h for the second lap which will see me round in about 3 hours.

Time for some food - some rather squashed peanut butter sandwiches are retrieved from my jersey and I slowly work my way through them over the course of the lap. They're a bit dry but they do the job.

My average speed is definitely slower over the second lap but I stay on course for my target speed and enjoy the cat and mouse with a few riders that I continue to beat up the climbs but get overtaken on the flat.

I'm ticking of the mileage 5ks at a time and it's great to see the 80k tick over and to know I'm nearly there. Only problem is the small matter of needing to run a half marathon is now getting scarily close. I realise I forgot to pick up my gels in transition which is a bit annoying as my plan was to have one at the end of the bike before the run - nevermind must remember to have one in T2!

Last small climb on the bike and I can see the entrance into the watersports centre ahead, here we go time to confront the run!

T2 is even slower than T1 with a quick loo break thrown in for good measure.

As I have got used to from my training brick runs; it feels like I am running incredibly slowly but a quick look at my pace shows I am around the 5.20 mark - I know I won't be able to keep that pace up but I stick with it for the moment as my legs start to loosen a touch.

A couple of minutes in and much to my annoyance it feels like I have some grit in my shoe. Not really thinking straight I try and ignore it and hope it will just magically go away. At the 2km mark with it beginning to get quite sore I do the sensible thing and stop and sort it out. Phew that's much better, quick look at the watch and pace for the second km has been around 6 mins - that's ok given I had to sort my shoe out, perhaps I'll put in an ok time, I'd really like to get close to 2 hours but I know that is ambitious given my best half is 2 hours without all the cycling!

A quick buzz from my watch shows a WhatsApp message has come through from my wife Leanne, I can't read it but I can imagine her nervously pacing the kitchen thinking about how I am doing. Need to keep going!

The run is getting tough now. The weather has been perfect so far but it's now starting to get quite hot and it's making it hard work. I make it to the first feed station and grab a quick gulp of water but I have not mastered the art of drinking whilst running and I end up splattering most of it over my face. It's also around that point that I realise I forgot to take on any feed at T2 time but I really don't feel like eating so I stupidly don't pick anything up from the feed stations.

I get to the 5k mark and I'm starting to find it really tough. My recent brick runs had been quite good and I am not sure why I am finding it quite so hard. My leg is starting to feel numb and my stomach doesn't feel right - the idea of food makes me feel sick - I try and have a blox gel around 7k but end up throwing it in the bin.

I cross the dam back towards the finish line but I know this is only lap 1 and I am going to have to turn round when I get there. I can hear the announcer gleefully shouting out "you are a vitruvian" as competitor after competitor crosses the line - how I wish that was me!!

I get to the end of the first lap at a pace that is now abismal and more of a plod than a jog, mentally this is by far the toughest moment of the race. I make my way round the cones at the drink station at the half way point and just stop with hands on knees, why am I doing this!!!

A marshall came over and gave me a drink and some words of encouragement. I can't remember what she said but it did the job; I pulled myself together and plodded off on my last lap.

Slowly but surely I started to get back into my running, it was still slow but it was starting to feel better. The feed stations were around every 1.5k so I got into a rhythm of aiming for the next station and walking for a few metres as I took on some water through the stations. Taking on some banana at one of the stations also seemed to help and whilst still knackered I started to believe I was going to get through this.

I reached the 5k to go mark and a marshall shouted out "just a park run to go", someone else on the course shouted out "you got this" and a group of older ladies we're cheering on "go Trisurrey", it was those little things that really helped as I neared the end.

Running down the final km all I could think of was how good it would be to cross the line, as I got to the final corner someone reminded me to zip up my top for the obligatory finish line photo.

And with a fist pump and a lot of relief I reached the line..... "Gavin Smith from Trisurrey you are a Vitruvian!" Music to my ears!

I crossed the line in 6hrs 10 mins. The time was slightly flattered by the course being slightly shorter than advertised (according to my watch anyway) but I didn't care; it was great to get round within my target time of 6 hrs 15 mins.

A fantastic day and so pleased to have done it. I'll never be at the business end of a triathlon in terms of time but nothing can match the feeling of crossing the line and knowing you've really pushed yourself. Go Trisurrey and on to the next one - Cotswold 2020 here I come!!!!