

Steelman Race Report - aren't they Supposed to be long?  
By: Andrea Hampton

## **The Steelman Triathlon (Sprint) - Lake Nockamixon Marina, Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, July 16, 2006.**

So I was asked: *"Did you make your goal (and, if not, was your goal totally stupid?)"*  
(Gayl M.)

And thus begins my race report!

**PACKET PICKUP:** Checked out the marina pier entrance to the swim and felt ok about the water. I knew that once past the knees, it's all deep water (it is what it is-no need to stress). See some groupings of ducks (maybe one will swim with me tomorrow-I'm a back of the packer!). Drove the bike route and saw 12 miles of continuous steep and rolling hills (I'm all right with that).

**PRERACE:** 6:00 a.m. arrival, body marked, bike checked by officials, prepare my transition area. Announcement made: NO wet suits allowed, water temperature 83 degrees. Ahh, still relaxed because I read, and they confirmed, the USAT rules that said under these conditions you may do so but not eligible for placement prizes (ha, not a concern and I need all the buoyancy I can get!!)

7:15 Sprint groups may enter the water for practice swim-Olympic folks long gone at 7:00. And this is where "IT" all begins:

I enter the water, take a few strokes, when it hits . . . a panic/apprehension attack. My heart is beating fast, I get that gasping feeling. I'm thinking I CANNOT DO THIS. I wade out ankle deep, look at the crowd and think I can simply take off my wet suit and cheer on the folks. But . . . I turn around and get back into the water. I still have that apprehensive feeling but do a few strokes, dodging bodies and flailing arms (oh no, not gonna let THAT happen again! (first tri, three weeks prior . . . smashed in the face)) Out I come, back in I go. A couple times of this routine and it's time to gather with my wave. A little chit chat and I'm feeling all right, moving on auto pilot.

**SWIM:** 7:45 a.m. "purple" wave over the timing mats, standing at waters edge (let the good swimmers in front), get buoy/route instructions, (hey there's a dog in here with us, is he going too?) and off we go. I'm swimming when disappointingly end up doing a lot of back stroke, but I'm stroking and siting, rounding the first buoy (ahhh lovely static buoys! (first tri . . . buoys moved farther away by current) Suddenly I hear a shout! The safety boat is waving me over - I'm swimming too far over!

In sum, let's just say I got a lot of "waves" after rounding the first buoy, when suddenly . . . beside me up pulls the kayak boat. The guy leans over and says *"So, where ya going? are ya going to the pier? or are ya going to the buoy?"* Dang, too far over again, and (dare I mention) one time going the wrong direction. Sigh. . . but I'm feeling very relaxed, I know I'm gonna get there, if nothing else I've got stamina and

buoyancy, and yeah I'm feeling ok!!

Finally rounding the last buoy with the help of Tim in the kayak who stayed to one side of me (yeah, at one point I asked him his name and gave a word a thanks while on my way in!)

Let me say here, If you need lots of cheers during a race . . . come in dead last! You will really feel the love as I did!!

But first, I must make it over the rocks before climbing up the dirt mound. (a native had clued me in to their sharpness/slipperiness earlier!) I'm feeling somewhat light headed and look like a drunken sailor as I stagger across the rocks. "Now", I say out loud, "is NO time to fall flat on my face, after all I made it!"

Finally, to transition [I just HAD to high five the folks cheering me first!]:

*[Time: 29:20 / 800 meters]*

**TRANSITION 1:** No trouble finding my bike . . . it's all alone on the rack! Still feeling slightly disoriented, heart beat jumping a bazillion miles a minute, change gear, take bites of nutrition bar, and out I go under the watchful eye of the official — no penalties here!!! *[time 3:28 / down from 5:22 in first tri -- because hey, it pays not to take time and fold your wet suit!!]*

**BIKE:** I ride the 20 yards out of transition, turn left and immediately encounter the beginning of a steep hill, distance of about 200 yards. I begin pedaling when suddenly IT happens . . . ABSOLUTELY NOTHING. At this point my heart rate is still jumping, I feel very shaky, my legs are screaming (I'm not), I look ahead and see bikers struggling up the hill when . . .

My bike wobbles, stops, and begins to fall sideways! Well, I do the only thing a savvy rider can do, and jump off (ok so I'm staggering), the bike clatters to the ground, out pops my water bottle, which begins to roll down the hill. Ooooh, I give quick chase (I need that Gatorade), get it together and realize I have no where to go but up, so I push the bike up the hill, keep my head down, panting like a crank caller, trying to get my breathing under control.

At the top, turn right, and ANOTHER HILL of about 100 yards. At this point I say to myself: "You *must* get on the bike, you must bike up this hill to begin getting yourself acclimated because this course is filled with hills (yes, I'm talking out loud at this point), AND you are absolutely NOT going to get off your bike and walk up any other hills on this course, so get on the bike!

Well, pep talks, and cheers encouraging you up the hill, work because finally I am at the main road where the miles really takes shape. Pheww!!

The bike portion was slow in many parts going up, but extremely (hear-the-wind whistling-through-my-helmet) fast on many parts going down. During the steep down hills I simply got comfortable, stayed in one position and looked ahead for any

potential pot holes and just enjoyed the ride!! At times my quads were screaming (again, I'm not) but I am breathing rhythmically, sweating, finding a steady cadence, and making it up and over each incline.

The pinky side of my left hand is getting numb, but amazingly my legs are feeling stronger as I take each hill. At one point I reach the bottom of a steep hill, and encounter the turnaround point, so I mentally and physically muscle my way back up! I avoided a turtle crossing the road; and made it to the last downhill road (the one I fell going up!!) back to the marina. It was tough but very rewarding particularly after my initial start, and in to transition. *[Time 1:16:23 / 12 miles]*

**TRANSITION 2:** place bike. Nope, not rack it but simply put the kick stand down because I'm riding a circa-not-this-decade, heavy steel, Huffy mountain bike; (oh did I mention late the day before that something happened to my left front brake pad . . . good thing brakes are not needed on a hilly course); changed into run gear and off I go. *[Time 1:20]*

**RUN:** THANK GOD FOR THE RUN . . . need I say more!! My legs felt good and any tightness was gone a handful of strides out of transition. Otherwise a minute walk a few times to adjust pounding heart rate *[Time 38:54 / 5k]*

*[Total time: 2:29:23; place 349/355]*

I am a newbie to the world of triathlons, indeed I had just relearned how to swim in October. So I joined the DC Tri Club and their fabulous New Triathlete Program. A few weeks before Steelman I completed, as a practice tri, the Motor City Triathlon in Detroit, my home town. There, the buoy moved, folks were off trajectory, and I was smashed in the face swimming . . . but, otherwise I greatly enjoyed and felt extremely relaxed on a flat course!

In stark contrast to Detroit, Steelman was extremely challenging both physically and mentally, and I am very glad for it because it stretched and taught me to push through mentally. My goal on the run was to work on determining heartbeat regulation early for maximum endurance later for my future endurance runs.

My triathlon goal next season would be to defeat that swim portion better with greater confidence and no backstroking, and who knows I might even get a bike made in the current decade. But otherwise training and doing the Detroit and Steelman Triathlon's were experiences, in many ways, not to be missed.

And here's a shout out of Thanks Very Much to family, the Washington Runners Summer Track program members, DC Tri members, and to all the known and unknown supporters, who gave advice, encouragement, prayers, ate complex carbohydrates at strategic times during their day on my behalf, and cheered me on during the race! It has all been a tremendous blessing!

So . . . Did I make my goals, and were they totally stupid? Well, going into training I

wanted to: 1) complete the swim without drowning; 2) challenge myself in an area that was outside my physical and general comfort zone; 3) finish the race; 4) get in a little better shape for my Marathon.

***Mission accomplished!***

***. . . until next year!*** (Who said that?!?)