

# Lazy girl running

Looking for her next challenge, **Laura Fountain** decides to take on her first ironman

I'm doing an ironman. That's a sentence that still feels quite uncomfortable when it comes out my mouth. I still can't really believe it. Of course, I'm not doing an ironman right at this moment (unless you happen to be reading this column on 20 July); I'm training for an ironman. That feels a bit more manageable. More real. My legs know that they're training for a long race – they've been putting in the miles week in, week out, since December.

When I tell people I'm training for an ironman, this very long distance triathlon, their reactions vary. A lot of people ask what it is, and I quickly ramble off a well-rehearsed reply: "It's a 3.8km swim, 112 miles on the bike and a marathon run to finish." If I say it quickly, it seems less scary. Then I try to close my ears or run away before their reaction comes: "But that's so far! How is that even possible?"

It is possible, lots of people do it, but until fairly recently it seemed quite impossible for me. Although I'm at home running 26.2 miles, I couldn't swim, and the furthest I'd ridden my bike was about 15 miles. But there was a time when I couldn't run more than 400m so I reasoned that if I put my mind to it and practised, a lot, I might be able to make similar progress towards swimming and cycling a bit further too.

When I tell some runners that I'm doing an ironman they look at me with suspicion. "But why would you want to do that?" Some runners view triathletes as a different species. The original plan was to complete a triathlon as a bit of a challenge. To master the other two disciplines and cross a finish-line or two. To push myself and challenge what I thought I could do in the same way that I did with that first 10k that then became a half marathon, and then, eight marathons later, a bit of a habit. What I hadn't expected was to enjoy the triathlon training.

After the initial few months of splashing and spluttering my way up and down a pool in Victoria having lessons, I started to get the hang of swimming. And as I started to get the hang of it, I started to enjoy it. I'm still no Keri-Anne Payne and hardly fast through the water, but now as I pull on my wetsuit and



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**  
Laura Fountain is a blogger, author and editor living and running in London. She's run seven marathons and is now training for an Ironman but just six years ago she couldn't run 400 meters. Her book *The Lazy Runner* was published in 2012. She's a UK Athletics qualified run leader and helps beginner runners learn how to run and, more importantly, how to enjoy it.

lower myself into the reservoir on a Saturday morning, it's excitement rather than fear that gets my heart beating a bit faster.

Cycling further on the bike has changed my perception of distance. Making plans to visit a friend who lives 60 miles away for the weekend now sends me straight to Google Maps to see what the cycle route would be like, whereas before I'd have been checking train timetables. The bike might take a bit longer than the train, but on a sunny day it's a lot more fun to peddle along country lanes with the wind in your hair than to argue with someone that, actually, that's your seat, you've got a reservation and would they kindly move because the train is hot and crowded and there are no other seats left. I never have a problem getting a seat on my bike.

The third reaction I get is a variation on: "That's amazing. I could never do that – I'd be too scared."

There's a good chance I won't be able to do it either. It's a long race and any number of things could go wrong that would see me having to pull out or not meet the cut-off times for each stage. But that isn't going to put me off training as best I can, lining up on race morning and having a go at it. Because where's the challenge in only attempting things you can do? Training for this race has taken me lots of places and helped me discover a love of swimming and cycling. Whether I get a finishers' medal or not, that's already a pretty good reward.



*Finishing my first triathlon last year*



*A key piece of kit - my wetsuit*