

May Day 24hr Multisport Rogaine

Winning team report

Course setting for a 24hr foot Rogaine has its pressures but throw in twelve canoe controls and a handful of high pointers 40 km away by mountain bike and you get interesting pre start team dynamics.

A 3pm start, a 6pm to 6am canoeing dark zone and a 2.40pm freshening 15-20 knot south/easterly buffeting lake Tinaroo saw the 'Ratpac' change course four times before finally pedalling off seven minutes after the other teams.

Brett and I had entered the race as a lead up to the Australian championships later in the month but after an couple of intense 8 hour training sessions with a visiting east German scientist named Jana we had no option but to include her as an official member of our team. We knew we were taking a risk, both on the home front and in the later stages of this endurance event but her smile was infectious and she had finished ahead of both Brett and I in a recent 8-hour multi sport race.

We cruised the outer series of controls in a clockwise circuit on our bikes, punching our card relatively unchallenged until dusk when we overshot 'The rail culvert'. Even Jana in her precise English was doubting that we knew what a rail culvert actually was. The culvert was clearly marked on the map but the path off the track to it was hidden by an undisturbed sheath of two and half metre high guinea grass. The relief of cracking the culvert marker using combined team skills gave us renewed confidence as we pedalled off to the more remote sections of our planned course.

Brett new 'blakey light' picked up all but one marker, which we abandoned after a fruitless two-hour search around midnight. The wasted time also saw Jana exposed to one of those unexplainable experiences of the tropical monsoon eucalypt forest - autumn spear grass. Jana had worn classic runners, knee length gaiters and had donned a light woollen coat as it cooled off around 11pm. This coincided with the time we entered a number of one to two metre high thickets of spear grass. The barbs wormed the way into her feet and attached themselves to her whole upper torso, leaving her looking like a huge echidna. Brett and I realised that over the past five years we had evolved to wearing gear, which was relatively resistant to the painful spear grass. Not only does the pest have the potential to cause after race infection, it also causes untimely delays when removing the irritating barbs.

The pre-dawn stretch saw us tackle three high pointers, which we knew were essential for us to remain competitive. The ride to get to them involved a climb of 540metres over 5km, followed by one energy-zapping hike to the pinnacle. The hike route took us 270 vertical metres up a 700m slope. Jana did not complain- there was no spear grass. Dawn broke as we nailed the pinnacle. We later learnt that the pinnacle had beaten one of our finest navigators Andrew Campbell, during the hours of darkness.

We stopped to pick up only a few markers on our race back to paddle the lake circuit, which had been forming in my mind. Plans had to be adjusted once again as a sea of white caps greeted us on rolling up to the dam wall. We had chosen to paddle a fibreglass Canadian canoe that had sparingly little free board, with Brett in the bow, Jana midship and me in the stern. We kept afloat by bailing regularly in the 40cm swells and only managed to travel 10km and collect four controls in two and half hours. They were atrocious conditions on the lake, but Jana was happy- there was no spear grass on the lake.

We managed 115-bike km, 21-hike km, a 100-metre swim, 10-canoe km and a 9min catnap during the event. Ratpac would like to thank all organisers, volunteers, fellow teams and sponsors for the most enjoyable event.

Terry McClelland, May 2005