



By Steve Jonas

THOUGHTS FROM THE BACK OF THE PACK

This past spring I started my 30th season in multisport racing, by that time having done over 220 tris and duathlons. As I am fond of saying, I started out slow and have been gradually getting slower. This is not to say that I have not won trophies. I've got a bunch of them. But that's only because in my region, metropolitan New York City, my age group has been small and getting smaller ever since I turned 60 (I'm now 75). So yes, if there are three or fewer of us in the race, assuming that I cross the finish line, I do come home with a plaque. But I'm always at the back of the pack overall. So I have had plenty of opportunity to develop the following top 10 thoughts for back there.

TOP 10 BACK-OF-THE-PACK HAPPENINGS

1. It's easy to find your bike after the first run, that is if you're a slow runner like me.

Since most everyone else has come and gone through the first transition by the time I get there, it is indeed easy for me to find my bike after the first run. And there are very few people to trip over or get in your way as you make your way to the bike exit. This is a definite advantage.

2. Aid station volunteers are saying, 'You can make it' rather than 'looking good.'

Actually, some volunteers do say "looking good" rather than "you can make it." However, most of the time, especially on the second run, I know that those who call out "looking good" are either just trying to be kind or need to make a visit to the optometrist.

3. Spectators offer you a ride in their car and you seriously entertain the offer.

That's never happened to me, but there have been a few times when I wish it had.

4. It's really difficult to find a place to park your bike before you start the second run.

This is the opposite of No. 1. This is where pre-race bike rack planning becomes very important. First, memorize where your bike rack spot is. Second, get to the race early enough so that you can get a spot at one end of your assigned rack, put your bike as close to it as possible, and place your stuff on the ground on the inside of your bike as it stands on the rack. This will make it more difficult for others coming in off the bike ahead of you to totally impinge upon your space.

5. With much space between you and the next racer in front of you, the volunteers and course marshals are busy working on their tans, instead of watching you.

This may happen at some races, but not in any of the ones that I've done over the years.

6. The massage table towels are dirty and soiled.

I've never gone for a massage after a race. I usually don't go fast enough to hurt enough to need it, and in any case, in most races I usually get in so late that the massage folks have already gone home.

7. You begin thanking the aid station volunteers for staying out on the course for so long.

Not only is it a nice gesture on your

part, but thanking the volunteers as you pass will increase the chances that they will go to the finish line to cheer you in when you finally do arrive there.

8. The fast athletes have finished the race before you even start the second run.

As I have gotten older and slower, I find it hard to remember when this did not happen.

9. The only place you're not sunburned is where your limbs are marked with your race number.

Yes, it is fun to still be wearing your race number after having taken five showers.

10. That old guy riding the Schwinn with a kickstand is trying to draft you.

Wrong. You are trying to draft that old guy riding the Schwinn with the kickstand. Or, you are that old guy or gal riding the Schwinn with the kickstand. Actually, one of the nice things about being in the back of the pack is that most everybody else back there is riding a bike that looks like mine (not a Schwinn with a kickstand, however), one that the person in the street can recognize as a bike that he or she might actually go for a ride on. There's a certain comfort in that — for me anyhow.

Let me conclude by adding my 11th back-of-the-pack thought: "It's better to be at the back of the pack than not be in the race at all."

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