

The Empire Runner

My Year Off

Rob Main

After a very successful and grueling year of competition in 2009, I decided to take it easy this year and try a wide array of events and sports. A number of my friends (who don't know me well) say I am very competitive – I disagree. I can take a year off!

I guess I could have picked an easier way to start 2010 than with the Annadel Half Marathon, but how often do you get to run a ½ marathon on your favorite trails with a start/finish line within ½ mile of your front door? My race strategy was simple: run the first 7 miles up to the summit at a conservative pace and race the downs. The strategy worked until the end of the 7 miles of ups. By that time I was so covered in mud, tired, cold (I had a head cold) there was no “race” left in me. I am a good downhill runner, but I wound-up even splitting the first half and second half! It was weeks before I recovered.

I was just getting the Annadel ½ marathon mud off my shoes when Shelli and I ran the Loop-de-Loop relay on a cold windy wet day. Remember? The rest of the spring brought two more 10k's and the Windsor ½ marathon. The 10k's helped me to a 1:37 finish at Windsor, good for 2nd AG. I passed on the Tahoe Relay to vacation in the Caribbean - which means miles of hiking, running and swimming - we don't sit still much - and get munched on by thousands of mosquitoes.

By the end of June I recouped for a strong effort in the Double Dipsea (2:28:26 running time, see July Newsletter), followed by a 2 mile swim race the next day (first and last time I will do those events back to back). The Kenwood 10k became a “fun run” as my body was still a week or so away from recovering from the DD. By the end of July, I had recovered and turned in a respectable 24th of 260 in the Tiburon Triathlon to kick off my mid-summer triathlon training.

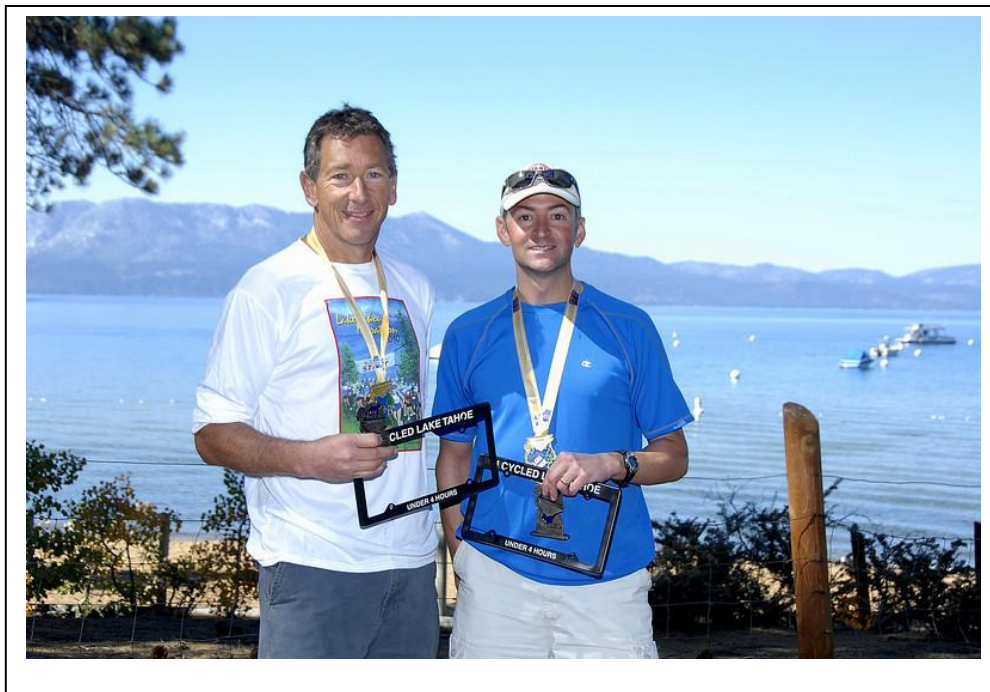
Shelli and a group of her friends had their sights set on the September 12th Ukiah Triathlon. Not wanting to miss out on that fun, I entered Ukiah and focused on triathlon training for the month of August. This meant once a week doing a 90% race effort “Brick” (bike – run workout) at distances similar to the race distances (18-22 mile bike and 3-4 mile run). After a disappointing Loop run on Sept 5th Shelli and I came back in the Ukiah Tri the following week. The event consists of a ½ mile swim, 21.7 mile bike and 5k run. My year-round swimming training allowed me to focus on training for the bike/bike-run portions, while Shelli's base on the bike and run allowed her to focus on getting ready for the 1/2 mile swim. Shelli raced well but missed her sub-2hr goal and podium finish by seconds, Shirley Fee had a strong finish to secure the top place in the over 60 division and I placed first in the 50 AG division with a time of 1:37:31. The ER's Mike Winters and a number of other Santa Rosan's participated as well.

Shortly after the Ukiah race, Eric Walker asked if I would like to join him in a one lap bike race around Lake Tahoe – Way Cool! That sounds like too much fun to pass up! I have swum in 3 relays across the lake and run in one relay around the lake – the bike race would complete the perfect Tahoe Tri-fecta. Plus there were time standard awards – I immediately focused on the sub-4 hour standard,

The Empire Runner

which equates to an 18 mph average for the 71 mile loop. With my longest ride of the summer still standing at 24 miles, and two weeks to train – err, I mean, one week to train and one week to taper - I opted to limit my last training ride to 30 miles and hoped my lack of training would not hurt me too much on the last half of the race.

Race day brought perfect weather to Tahoe; 43F at the 7am start, clear skies and no wind. The race started at Zephyr Cove, on the southern Nevada side, and proceeded in a clockwise direction around the lake. There are two big climbs, one at the 12 mile point at Emerald Bay and one at the 56 mile point on the north east side of the lake; a beautiful but grueling 7 mile climb up to Spooner Summit (7,050 ft). In order to go sub- 4 hours I would need to fuel well, get some good drafting, and not bonk.



I took off with the lead peloton until the Emerald Bay climb – we averaged nearly 25 mph for this 12 mile section. The trade-off of using more energy than I wanted for these first 12 miles was a one-time opportunity of getting the amazing draft with this large a group. I relaxed on the Emerald Bay climbs and took a small breather at the summit to take off my beanie and arm warmers. After this brief rest I noticed that I was right on a 20 mph avg. A fast decent (up to 47 mph) followed by on and off drafting with small groups of riders allowed me to stay on this pace to the North Shore Stateline. Facing the climb up to Spooner Summit with a lack of training and a faster-than-I-thought-possible first 50 miles

The Empire Runner

made me wonder what was in store for me on the climb. Going up Spooner I passed bikers who had bonked and riders who were stopped by the side of the road stretching their cramping quads. I focused on steady controlled breathing and relaxed, as much as I could. Eric, who had been more conservative at the start, overcame my strong early pace with a great climb and caught me just before the summit. The 8 mile decent to Zephyr Cove was a great reward for the long climb and what a relief to finally see the finish line. Eric finished in 3:41 and I was a minute back in 3:42. Both of us captured the sub- 4 hour award. Sweet! Shelly Lydon and a group of Santa Rosa ladies also did the bike race; however, they also competed in a swim race the day before and in a 10k run the day after (Shelly won the 10K).

Now it was time to switch back to running for the Healdsburg Half Marathon on October 10th. Again there were only two weeks between races of different sports: One week to train as a long distance runner and one week to taper. The Healdsburg Half Marathon brought over 700 half marathoners and over 200 marathoners to the 7:30am start in central Healdsburg. It was a beautiful day for the half – we ran in a clockwise direction up West Dry Creek across Lambert Bridge and back to town on Dry Creek Rd – an awesome rolling course thru the vineyards during harvest. My goal was to hold a steady 7:30 per mile pace. I comfortably cruised through mile 4 averaging 7:28/mile; through mile 8 averaging 7:31, through mile 10 averaging 7:33 and I finished at 1:39.00 for a 7:33 average, good enough for an AG 3rd place. Cool! Congratulations to Karen F-T for an awesome PR of 1:34:52 (3rd female overall); Shirley Fee also ran well a day after her 65 mile Fondo; Steve Cryer took the 55 yr old group with a strong 1:36:23; and my Shelli toughed-out a 1:56:16 on very little training.

Other than a few odds and ends events, yet to be completed, that ended my smorgasbord year off. Thanks to all who helped me on this fun journey and encouraged me to reach out of my comfort zone to new endeavors, including climbing with the Bubbas. I can't wait to see what 2011 has in store, perhaps I will take another year off.