Nick Jackson's Ironman training plan

A few people at the club have asked me regarding the training programme I did for the Ironman this year (Challenge Vichy), myself and Natalie followed this programme this year.

So I thought it would be easier to type it up and post it on the website, (this is by no means the be all and end all to ironman training) but from my experiences and that of my friends and families this programme has got through 14 Ironman's in total by 7 different people all of whom have done well and exceeded expectations at one point or another over the last 16 years whilst having full time jobs. It was written by a man we all know called Doug (the yoda of training) and it has been steadily adapted and tweaked since.

If you have a job or other time constraints it is hard to simulate the ironman distance whilst training, the way around this it to 'overload' over a period of time, we use a 3 weeks block to simulate the tiredness you will encounter and so you are effectively always training whilst tired, then to have 1 week recovery, and start again but the next block increase the times/distances over the same period.

I have completed this plan 4 times in total, 2006/2008/2011/2013. Something I started in 2011 was to do every run off the bike, I didn't quite manage it in 2011 but this year I think 95% of my runs have been off the bike, I think this makes a difference as running off the bike for an ironman is so important and my running is a lot better than in previous years.

An example being my first ironman run was in 2006 when I ran 5hrs 20 off the bike and died quite badly on the run, whilst this year it was 3hrs 29 and I felt a lot better.

The programme below is a 24-25 weeks and it's set out in blocks of time/distance's, it is hard to explain the sets we did on the bike/running but I will try. It must also be highlighted I would probably do 4 weeks of 'pre-training' at about half the distances of week 1 to get ready for week 1!

Another point you may notice I don't include swimming in this , this is because there is an assumption in the plan you will swim for 2 hours a week at least.

Also I must add for insurance purposes I am a BTA level 2 coach and do coach at the club regularly, this plan is a general plan and not aimed at any specific athlete.

Block 1

Week 1-3

Bike – 126 miles – approx. 6hrs 30mins

Run- 27 miles – approx 3hrs 30-4hrs

Week 4- rest week- would tend to do 2 bikes/2 runs in these weeks

Block 2

Weeks 5-7

Bike- 140 miles- approx. 7 hours

Run-32 miles- approx 4-4hrs 30

Week 8 – Rest week

Block 3

Week 9-11

Bike- 152 Miles- approx 7-30-8hrs

Run-34 miles- approx 4-30-4-45hrs

Week 12- Rest Week

Block 4

Weeks 13-15

Bike-175 miles- approx 9-10hrs

Run- 36 miles= approx 5 hrs

Week 16- rest week

Block 5

Weeks 17-19

Bike – 192 miles- approx. 10-11hrs

Run – 40 miles- approx. 5-30-6hrs

Week 20- Rest Week

Block 6

Weeks 21-23

Bike- 200miles plus- 11hrs plus (as much as can)

Run- 40 miles plus- 6 hrs plus (as much as can)

Week 24- Taper 1 – depending on the athlete . I personally do a few days resting then in the middle-end of the week a couple of 2 hr bricks with high intensity/low volume and my last proper session was a hour turbo / 40 min run a week before the race.

Week 25- Taper 2/ Race week- Again depends on the athlete- I like a do 3 sessions this week, 1 swim, I small brick and either another small bike or run 2 days before the race.

The most important thing in these last two weeks is recovery/ making sure you don't overeat or undereat and staying healthy and fit as the training is now done! I usually feel awful in these last 2 weeks and get niggles but this is just your body repairing and recovering.

Whilst these are just distances and times to aim for it is obvious when you add 2 hours swimming on (maybe more if you can find the swims!) that you are starting at around 11-12hrs total training in block 1 and going up to over 20 hours by the end, you can also go over the distances set if you want, as I did this in some of the early weeks but you also have to ensure you get good quality in your training so there is a balance.

Regarding the sessions, I did 1 track session on a Monday at Leverhulme having done a turbo session earlier if possible. I would do usually 3-4 turbos per week min 1hr per session, and get out on the bike at least once per week for a big brick, which I would consider at least 4hrs including the run, ideally twice but this was not always possible with time and weather etc.. I would usually do 4 runs always at least an hour long, and nearly always after a bike. The biggest brick I did was 6hrs 30mins, a 4hr 30 ride then a 2 hour run. Importantly though I had done a 2hr 30 brick the day before, and a 3hr brick the day before that, that's how overload works, training and hitting the same heart rates/power etc whilst tired from yesterday. If you cant hit the same heart rates/powers etc then you may be adapting and need to get as close as you can.

I do think going on the turbo and doing a hard session for 1hr 30- 2hrs is a very good session and builds a lot of strength into your cycling, whilst not ideal I think this is better if you have come home from work and if you go out on the bike it would take you a long while to get properly cycling anyway and you may not get the most out of it. It is always easier to go on the turbo with people, as we did quite a lot this year, get a set and do it.

Regarding turbo sets , we tend to use the supercoach trifuel website to get a lot of our sets, Ste has the link to this and they are generally good hard sets that work well. If I am going on for longer say 2hrs plus I have sometimes used 2 of the main sets and done both in one session to prolong the session. Turboing can be boring but I think if you have time constraints then the turbo will become a good friend of yours over the course of the training, a heart rate monitor or some way of gauging your effort on a turbo is essential- you need to be over 75% heart rate/effort for prolonged period of time as this is your ironman zone.

Over this training we have wrote down pretty much every turbo we have done if anyone is interested or wants any turbo ideas we have a lot of sets, anything from 45min- 4hours long!

Like I said at the start this is by no means the right or wrong way to do it but it has worked for me and lots of people have done very good times following this or similar plans.

I have a lot more detailed info of sessions and sets etc which is far too much to put into this but again if interested please ask and I'll send you whatever. One thing I haven't mentioned is nutrition but this a long topic and if anyone wants any advice re this then I can give good and bad stories re whats happened to me in the past! One thing is to train with the gels/fuel you are going to race with or that the organisers are giving out so you can get used to it and avoid stomach issues on the run.