

Killarney Hardman Full Distance Report - Frances (Frankie) O'Sullivan Byrne

August 29th 2020

Ger has asked me to give an account of my first full distance Hardman.

Why the Hardman?

I will take you back to my journey of Ironman training to 2018. I had signed up for Austria 2019. During my I was cycling in Killarney in January 2019 when I had my bike accident. I received a full orbital fracture on the left side of my face and a significant head injury, to say the least I was a very lucky lady. Due to my accident I was out of work from January – July 2019. It gave me time to reflect on my future in taking part in triathlons. As I was recovering I thought long and hard about doing another Ironman, so I took the decision to enter Youghal 2020. As you know Covid-19 took full control in that so it was cancelled. So, I looked at my options again and decided to continue training and register for the Killarney Hardman 2020.

How training has changed my life?

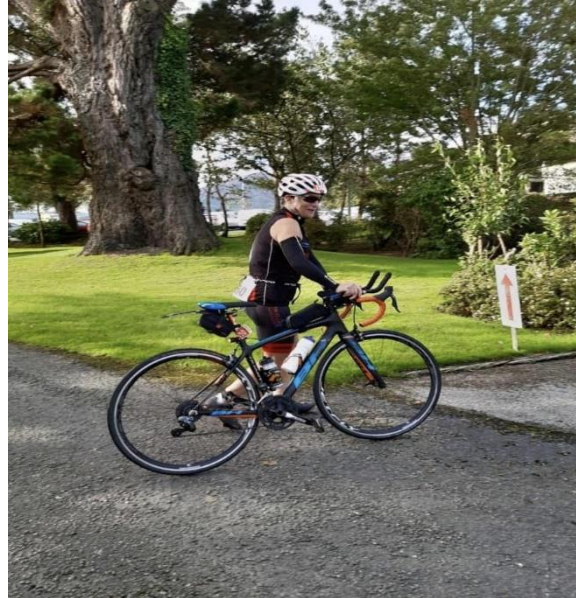
I was used to training for a few years as I did my first marathon in Dublin in 2003 and continued to complete many others in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Amsterdam. In total 15 marathons. Coming from marathon training to triathlon training was a whole new ball game. Training 3 disciplines was a big challenge. I did my first triathlon in 2015 in Castlegregory called the 7 Frogs. I had the assistance of an angel swimmer for the entire 750 metres, doing the stroke that resembled somewhat of a breaststroke as I couldn't put my head under water. The swim in that event took me 42:21. I was actually walking on air to have survived the water and I finished the sprint distance in 1:59:51. I thought I was a very serious contender. I continued to take part in triathlons and always struggled with the breaststroke. I learned how to do the front crawl when I join Mallow Tri Club in August 2016. The training with Mallow Tri Club was fantastic from the swimming to the cycling on a Sunday morning under the guidance of Stephen Jones and Donough Barrow. They thought me everything I know about the bike. It was great to meet all the other wonderful members and to be part of a growing club.



Hitting my goals on the day of the Hardman:

In preparation for my event along with all my training, Heather O'Brien gave me a great sports massage which I was thankful for. My friend Sarah White and myself got up at 4:15am on Saturday morning in the Castlerosse Hotel. I looked out the bedroom window in the pitch black and wondered what the hell am I getting myself in for. I had to gather my thoughts and prepare for my big event. I had my breakfast in the room which was 2 scones with jam and tea. We met Tony in the lobby and headed to the Killarney Golf Club at 5:15am. Transition opened at 5:30am. I met Brendan and Donough, we were all in our own bubble and wished each other the best of luck. I was nervous but it was a good feeling knowing I was well prepared for the event thanks to Sarah who had my programme down to a fine art. I was well pleased to see the beautiful calm lake. It was great to see

all my family there plus my siblings giving me wonderful support. The time had come to enter the water, I was after going over the swim route and direction of the buoys with Donough a hundred times with nerves. Once in the water the nerves went and it was down to business. I enjoyed the swim even though I couldn't see a thing on the second lap as the sun was blinding, I was depending on the splashes of other athletes to guide me. I came out of the water on cloud 9, delighted the swim was over. On the way to transition I met Ger Vowles and he said, "Well done Frankie, keep it going". My swim time was 2:03. As I entered transition all I could hear from the loudspeaker was "Here comes Glamorous Granny", my siblings gave my whole life story to the MC while I was swimming. It was a bit of fun sure I enjoyed it. I gathered my thoughts once again and got myself on the road for the Ring of Kerry. My family wished me luck and waved me off. I had my nutrition down to a fine art again thanks to Sarah. I paced well out on the bike and at Torc I got the biggest cheer from Heather, Pauline, Paula, Ed and Jill. I was delighted to see them. They gave me brilliant support. I hope I didn't forget anyone as I was on top of them before I realised who was there.



My daughters Cliodhna and Niamh and hubby Mick followed me around the Ring of Kerry. Every so often I would hear "Come on Mom" so it kept me going. I got my nutrition bag in Waterville and refuelled. The scone with jam went down a treat. Again, it was a family affair, the cheer of "Come on Mom" echoed in my ears for the whole journey. We did have a headwind from Waterville which was hard going for a while.

Coming into Killarney was a great feeling. Just at the dismount I was greeted by the amazing athletes and families from the Mallow Tri Club giving me every bit of encouragement and again hearing the words "Come on Mom" from Cliodhna and Niamh. It was just an amazing feeling. My husband Mick



was like a top photographer capturing every moment. Going into transition I met Brendan on his run, again he wished me well, I was so delighted to see him. I dropped my bike in transition 2 and prepared for my run. I felt really good and soaked up the atmosphere. Niamh was on duty with the drinks etc. by the transition. Cliodhna and Aidan were supporting me by the hotel with the flat Coke. I looked forward to every lap for the support of the Mallow Tri members, their families, Sinead and Pauline's girls chanting "Frankie Frankie" as I passed through. I felt like a true celebrity. Out over the loudspeaker at every lap as I passed through was "Here comes Glamorous Granny again" as the MC counted down my laps. I was so thrilled to see Stephen, Linus and Donough again giving me every bit of encouragement as they breezed past me on

the run. I was delighted to meet Tony also as we chatted words of encouragement to each other. I spent all my long bike rides with Tony every weekend. Thanks to Tony for making out all the bike routes. On my last lap Niamh ran with me giving me plenty of encouragement to get to the finish line. At that stage I had to use my torch. Coming up to the finish, I was met with a glow of lights from phones and torches again the Mallow athletes and their families and the children ran into the finish with me chanting "Come on Frankie". It was just the best feeling I ever had. Coming to the finish line for the last time I heard "Here comes the Glamorous Granny finishing her Hardman". Huge thanks to my family, friends and especially the Mallow Tri Club athletes and families for the support and encouragement for the whole day.



What would I change in training or the way I raced?

I can say with complete confidence I wouldn't change anything in preparation for this event. I put total trust in Sarah White, she left no stone unturned. Sarah, Tony and I cycled the route a few weeks before this event. I knew I was ready both mentally and physically for the challenge ahead. I paced out well in all 3 disciplines and finished strong. I was honoured to take part in this event with the great athletes from the Club Tony, Donough, Stephen, Linus and Brendan which they all competed well on the day.

Going forward I would like to improve in the 3 disciplines especially my swimming. This experience has showed me that anything is possible. When I think back on my first triathlon in 2015 and everything I have overcome up to now, I know if I can do it anyone can! Always follow your dreams and work on your goals, no task is too big. I am proud to be a member of Mallow Tri Club and best wishes to all the members going forward.