

An aspiring Ironman/woman – Part 1

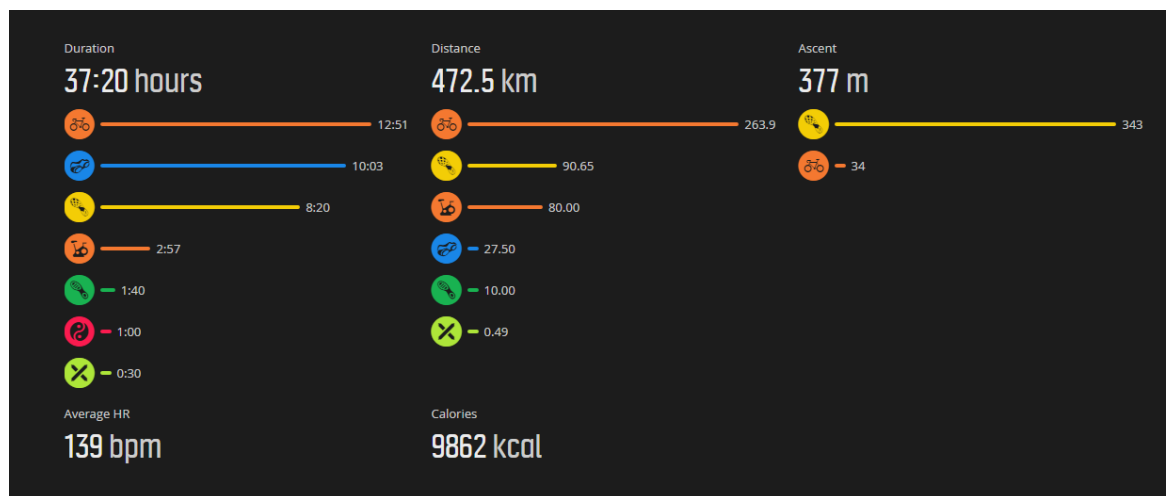
DECEMBER 2016

After couple of years thinking about it, I realised there never will be a right time for me to do an IM – life is busy, excuses are formed, priorities change. There was an IM buzz about the club this autumn with so many signing up for IM Barcelona in October 2017, but I knew that that was not the race for me. As my brother had done the year before, I entered the Challenge Roth lottery on December 6th leaving a start line place to fate. When I didn't get one the disappointment sent me back looking. The 'ideal' course for me would have a sea swim, a not too hilly bike and a flatish run. I wanted it done by August so I could enjoy some of the summer. While the big races do sell out a year in advance, I realised I could get a place in IM Frankfurt though Nirvana, so quickly decided this was the one for me. It was my husband who said, just go for it - although I am not sure he realises he won't be golfing before July 9th.

I don't have a sporty background (20 years a smoker with no involvement in any sport) but since crossing the line in my first Sprint in 2009 I have loved triathlon, setting new targets and ambitions every year. When I was younger I had always thought you had to be good or win to enjoy something – who knew mediocrity was so enjoyable? In my 7 year triathlon career I have done 7 Half IM (Mallorca x 2, Lisbon, Salou, Kenmare x 3) none which were spectacular, but all of which I finished and enjoyed. Before deciding on a Long distance event, I was doing 5-7 training sessions a week anyway. A mini challenge I set myself was to do something every day in December. This proved a mental battle and I made myself run before work or in the evenings after 8 – something I had never done before. With the good weather over the Christmas holidays, my streak kept going until December 27th, when a few days away with the family took priority.

I want to do this without it taking over my life and to paraphrase Chrissie Wellington in a recent interview, to do the best I can, within the context of my life.

DECEMBER 2016 SUMMARY



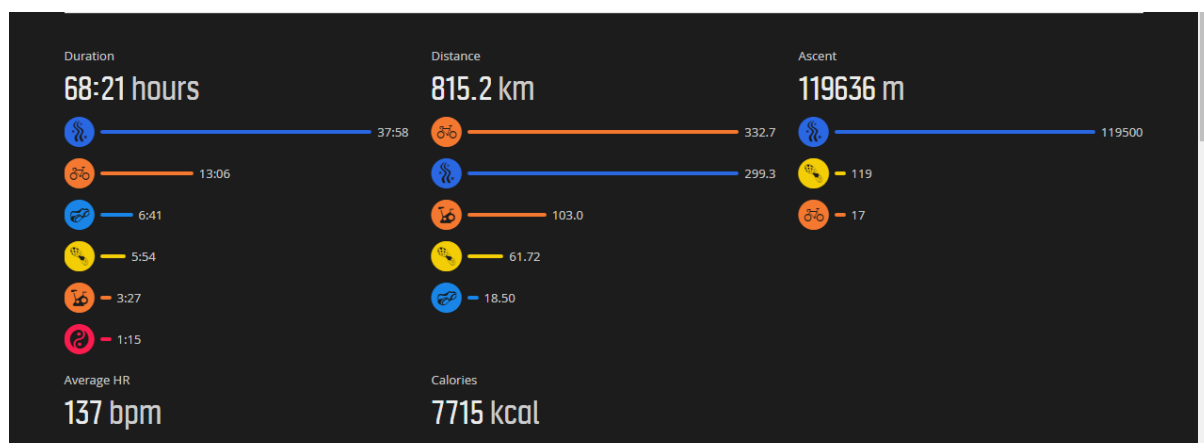
JANUARY 2017

New Year's Day was a Sunday, most of the world was still in bed but I headed for the Parkway for the Club spin, my birthday celebration and a positive start to the year (10 of us did a 55km spin). I started to let people know I was doing IM and planning what I needed to do. The other LTC guys going to Frankfurt (Keith, Ken, Philip and Mike Q) added me to their *Whats App* group, and the banter began.

There's a wealth of IM experience and encouragement in the club. There's also advice from every angle, whether you ask for it or no, so I think it's important to be able to filter it and not panic.

I continued my base training using the Don Fink plan and had 3 consistent weeks before a week away. My swimming is fine, it's time in the saddle and on my feet that's need. Learning to pull back to a lower heart rate is harder than it sounds and I have started to really enjoy sessions on the Wattbike in the gym (although I hate the Turbo). My other priority it to eat well – to me there's no point in training hard and eating badly. At 72kg, dropping a few kilos would be nice, but I am guessing I could be the first person ever to train for IM and put on weight!

JANUARY 2017 SUMMARY



(Ski data skews the monthly training stats, but it was still aerobic exercise)

FEBRUARY 2017

Non triathletes ask me :

- Why? (*Why not?*)
- Where do you get the time? (*Who knows - you always make time for things you enjoy - If I could get back some of my wasted youth..... I am lucky with where I work and things like tying in a long run to my kids 1.5 hour GAA session works*)
- Oh such and such did that in Dublin last year? (*Yes - that was Ironman, but half distance...*)

Triathletes ask:

- What's your target time? (*Any time before cut off - the medals are all the same. Thanks yes, I now know there is a 15 hour cut off at Frankfurt!*)
- Are you getting a tattoo? (*Never say never*)

My week's holidays turned into 10 days off Swim/bike/run, but I came back to it full of energy. The general outline is Monday off, Tuesday to Friday has 2 swims, 1 bike, 1 Brick and 2 runs. Saturday is a long bike and Sunday long run. Not forgetting some Pilates. The part I hadn't expected is the time it takes to get organised for kit and food the night before, especially on double training days.

Struggling to make myself go out the door on a recent wet evening, I got a pep talk from my 10 year old son: 'Mom, do you want to be an Ironman?..... Then just go'. Between the support at home, the club and the 'Frankfurters', it's been fun so far and I am not as exhausted or daunted as I imagined I would be.

FEBRUARY 2016 SUMMARY



4 solid weeks of training done, and now the build phase begins.



Aspiring Iron Distance – Part 2

Without realising it, I didn't put my name onto my first post, which you can read [here](#).

So I am Sinead Walsh, currently treasurer of Limerick TC and I also do a little swim coaching for the club. Outside of triathlon I work full time, am a wife, mother to 2 active primary school kids and enjoy travel, cake and red wine. You can take the woman out of West Clare, but you can't take West Clare out of the woman, so despite nearly 15 years in Limerick I will always be a Clare girl.

March 2017

As the distances and hours start to ramp up, March can be summed up as windy and consistent. Much of my Tuesday to Friday training has stayed with the same hours, but now some speed intervals are now part of the Wattbike and run sessions so the intensity has increased. Weekend spins are now up to 4.5 hours. Many of the spins were in very windy conditions making it impossible to try and keep a steady heart rate – I always seemed to be slogging into the wind or flying with a low HR with the wind behind. The clock change has really made a difference to all our spirits but I won't be packing away my winter cycling gear just yet. I was delighted have followed my plans, only missing one 45 min run from the programme for the whole month. Starting out on this plan I would never have imagined I would have the resolve do a 4 hour plus bike on my own, but with other commitments I often have to go it alone, and it's not as bad as it sounds.

The Club held four talks in March, all of which I found useful. It was fascinating to hear how those at the other end of IM train – Garron Mosley's commitment and passion are amazing. As I have a big personal interest in food and nutrition, Fergal O'Connor took some of the fluff away with his straight talk on Nutrition for Age groupers. Last week Niall Collins had us looking at some of our strengths and weaknesses on the Psychological aspects of sport (and how to work on them) and Feargal O'Callaghan gave us an inspirational insight into his epic Marathon de Sables.

I am starting to think now about practicalities like clothes and nutrition for the day. I am finding although I eat on the bike, I am tending to be hungry especially if I haven't eaten enough the day before a long spin so I am going to try and pay more attention to this as I ramp things up further.



Aspiring Iron Distance – Part 3

APRIL 2017

I was lucky enough to get a few days way in Mallorca at the start of April – someone spotted very reasonably priced flights from Shannon, so before I changed my mind we booked into Club Pollentia on the north of the Island, where I had stayed previously when doing the Mallorca 70.3. The area and hotel are cyclist & triathlete heaven. We rented full carbon road bikes from one of the 2 onsite bike shops, and with indoor and outdoor heated lap pools, it was perfect. Breakfast was like a Garmin convention, with IM/Cycling/event T shirts all on display before about 700 bikes rolled out onto the roads of Alcudia. The weather was nice enough for shorts, although windy, you did need arm warmers and gilletts for the decents. We did 4 good days of training, with plenty of hills, and some run and swim. I did my first >5 hour ride, allowing me to practice nutrition and imaging what it might be like in Frankfurt in July. The one thing I did notice was the bottom of my feet really felt like they were on fire after 4.5 hours – not sure if it was the heat or friction or a combination, but I have invested in some proper bike socks which I hope will sort the issue.



Joey Hannan was a great day, the club and Limerick did themselves proud. I have never done Joey but have been in the background for the last 8 years. You could feel the energy and excitement of the new triathletes, those stepping up distance and those heading into 70.3s in Mallorca, Barcelona and Lough Cultra. While ideally I should be doing an Olympic, and a Half in the run up to July 9th, I am not planning on doing any actual events, but rather doing the distances here. This is mostly from a time perspective – I don't want to spend time traveling to and from an event when I am pressed for time anyway. And neither too I want to push too hard and undo the work I have done so far. Over the next few months I will miss the banter and comraderie of the events (which is one of the big reasons why I am in the sport), but we have plenty banter on our long spins too (just no coffee stops!)

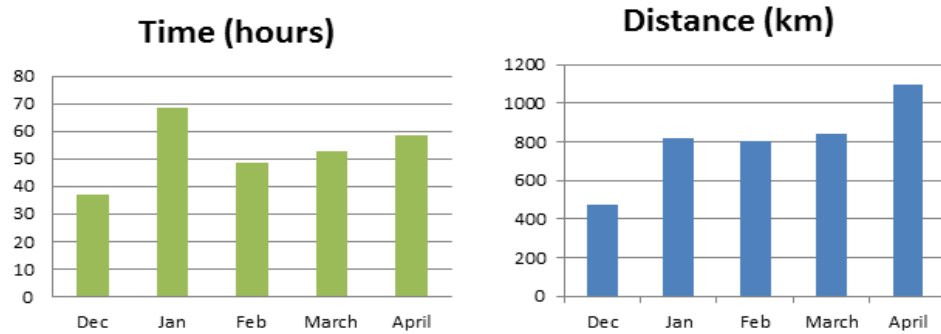


At this stage I can honestly say I have never felt better. Looking back over my training data for last year (when I was training for Challenge Salou HIM) I was doing about half the distance and half the time, but it was all a slog and I now realise 'junk miles'. I think the key difference in how I feel is firstly the intensity of the sessions, and secondly there is a purpose and objective to every session, which I now have some understanding of. I have learnt the you defiantly swim better in the morning – its difficult to get a feel for the water when you are tired, and the same is true of running – keeping a steady pace and Heart rate is so much easier in the early morning.

Not all sessions go well – last week I had a super long run, one shocking and one good swim session. Saturdays long bike left me broken (granted we did have the last 2 hours into a strong wind), but the next day's run made up for it. I took my first dip in the open water on May 1st and it was great to be back in the sea.



With less than 10 weeks to go the IM is very real now. My aim has always been to complete rather than complete, and I feel confident now that I can do it.



Aspiring Iron Distance – Part 4

MAY 2017

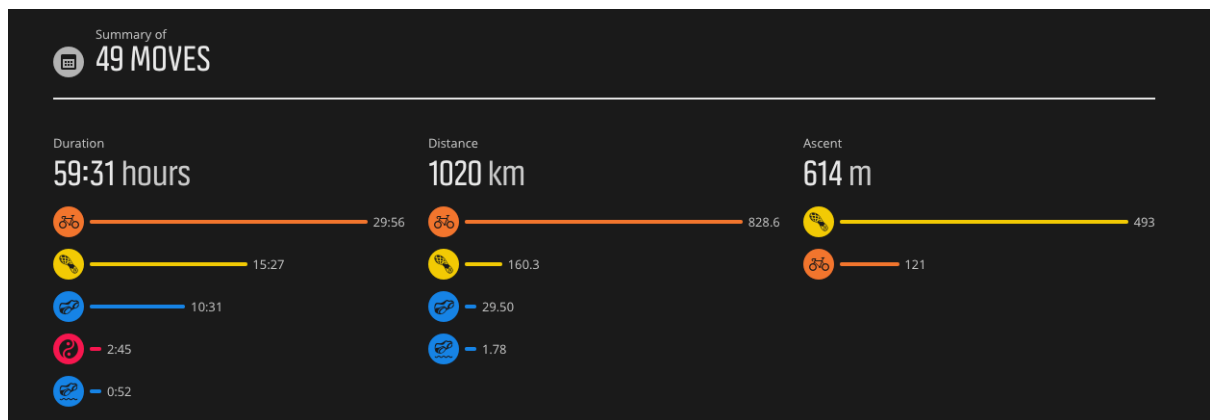
In the thick of training this month, and I did have to wonder why I had chosen to do an event in July. May is always a hectic month in our house, with loads of birthday's, parties and get togethers, it was a constant juggle, but I got there. I didn't find the training too hard – it was more the logistics of how can I do a 6 hour bike and travel to a party and get the kids to 2 different matches etc. (The answer is mostly to simply to get up earlier!) Outside of swimming I trained almost entirely alone this month. I was on the road every Saturday by 0700, but that left me free from 1400. I did laugh out loud at an article I read that said you absolutely have to sit down for 2 hours after a long training session – that might work for Pros, but not for many in the real world!. In April it was a breakthrough to do a 5 hour bike – I have now done multiple 6 hour plus bikes. Even on your own the time does pass quickly – you are watching heart rate, keeping in mind technique, concentrating on drinking and eating regularly. And even though it was officially summer, it seemed the wind came up every time I hit road for a long bike and I was wetter and dirtier than I have ever been.

I have been inspired by many who have gone before in club, but none more so than Catherine Corby, who took on the notoriously difficult IM Lanzarote this month. Catherine was amazing– she decided to do it, put her head down and just got on with the training. I was glued to the phone awaiting the news that she had crossed the line. By all accounts, tough as it was, she smiled the whole way round and became an Ironman.

With all the socialising, I met quite a few people I hadn't seen in the last six months. I have changed shape a bit, my face is weather beaten and I was uncharacteristically abstemious from alcohol. A bit like when you are pregnant, people seem to feel they can give their opinion and offer advice; An old friend told me (cigarette in hand) that they didn't think endurance sport was good for you. At another party one person said my husband was 'very good to let me' and another commented she 'wouldn't do it to her kids'. She might have had a point. My 9 year old has accompanied me on her bike for a number of long runs and she did ask me was it normal for a 9 year old to cycle 15km, all I could tell her was that it was our normal!

One drawback of deciding to do this without a coach or do any races, is that you are not quite sure of where you are – have you done enough? You hear others talking about their training and I feel like I am doing hardly anything by comparison, but then I know I don't have any more time to give and that I am following a recognized and proven plan. With my swim times just about holding, I did decide to give the cycle Time Trial a go. The night I picked was ideal, warm and still. I was delighted with a 36:04 for the 20km. Looking back on sprint Triathlon times, I have rarely broken 40 minutes for the bike, so I must be doing something right.

So here I am with only 4 weeks to go. I can't believe what I have done so far, how quickly the time has gone and how in less than a month the adventure will be over. Yikes!



Aspiring Iron Distance – Part 5

UNE 2017 As the final weeks approached I opted for a test and confidence session a 'Metric IM' 2.6km swim, 112km Bike and 26km run. This was an opportunity to put all 3 disciplines together, to practice my nutrition and ensure my gear was comfortable to wear for the day. I chose to do it on a Friday, to include a pool swim, as even though I am a confident swimmer, I would never swim alone. This worked out really well and gave me a huge confidence boost. This was a month out and almost my last big weekend, with cycle time reducing and the midweek sessions remaining much the same. My taper began the weekend of HoTW, and although I didn't train on the day, I was on my feet for 12 hours. The weekend made me very excited and I enjoyed chatting to fellow triathletes about their IM experiences.



Packing began early as all 5 of us going from Limerick had opted to go with Ship my TriBike – a fantastic service where our bikes and a bag were picked up in Limerick the week before the race and transported overland to the race venue, all ready for collection when we arrived. Sending the bikes made the whole thing suddenly very real.

We traveled to Frankfurt on the Thursday before Sunday's event, this gave a bit of extra time for finding our way around and making sure there was ample rest, eating and relaxing time. It was easy to spot the Triathletes on the plane and we met some guys from Dublin and Waterford, who we would meet many times over the next few days. Frankfurt city is quite compact and very easy to get around. Thursday was hot and humid - after registering we were caught in a huge downpour while exploring the EXPO on the quays.



Friday's race briefing hinted at the temperatures we may have to expect on Race day, but we were assured there were plans in place for extra ice, salt and water. The inevitable question of whether the swim would be wetsuit or non wetsuit would be not be answered until Sunday morning. I wasn't bothered, but I knew it was a stress factor for the boys. You can only control the controlables, I resolved that I wasn't going to let the heat be my undoing – I had done the training and the marathon wouldn't be fun even in the cold.

The swim venue was a little out of town at the Langener Waldsee and we took our bikes out to be racked on Saturday. It was only then you could feel the scale of the event, with >2800 athletes Transition was long! The venue itself is a flooded quarry, and as we were there we took a dip. The water was lovely and the course better marked than any I had seen, with Yellow bouys marking the first loop, an Aussie exit and then a second longer loop marked in Red.



After some food with the lads I headed back to my hotel to rest – something I am not great at, but I did manage a snooze, and after a final run through of my gear, I went out for some ice cream (easily digestible carbs and fat)

RACE DAY

I slept very well and woke to my alarm at 0430. My hotel was not doing an early breakfast, so I had some porridge I had brought from home with coffee before heading for the bus to take me to the swim venue. Tyres pumped and nutrition on the bike, I met with the lads as transition closed - wetsuits allowed the relief on their faces was obvious and we headed to the swim start. The atmosphere was electric with music pumping at 0630 as the Pros were introduced. I was strangely calm and not at all nervous, but was overcome with emotion - I couldn't believe I was standing on the start line of an Ironman. I had worked to be here, but felt humbled and determined to give what I could.

It was a rolling start, with everyone self seeded in pens : 6 swimmers went over the mats every 10 seconds starting their race. I knew I was in the right place at 60 -70 min (I had swum around the OBB island with Richard at 3.8kph on Monday) but I couldn't believe how many people were on the < 60 min pen. Once the pros went it really didn't take very long until I was at the front of the line and it was my turn. It was the smoothest swim I have ever been in! I began to over take people very quickly (some breaststroking and clearly not going to be anywhere under 90min let alone 60. The swim did become a little more challenging when we turned into the rising sun it was hard to spot the bouys, but I just kept swimming. The Aussie exit really broke things up and the longer loop was actually easier, but I did feel I had taken a scenic route and had no idea of my time.



On land there were shouts from Ken's family and others who spotted the LTC colours. I took my time in transition making sure the sand was off my feet before I headed off on the bike. I had been warned the first section was fast down into Frankfurt, and bikes were indeed zooming past me: I had my watch on my bike to monitor HR, and went off sticking with the plan. The bike course was 2 loops on lovely roads passing through countryside and villages full of enthusiastic residents. There were 2 or 3 hills on each loop (my many trips up the Birdhill interchange served me well) but otherwise pretty flat. I was sticking to HR and eating (Bananas & Cliff bars) as planned as well as drinking at every opportunity and taking salt tablets. I knew I was making great time, and was likely to break my estimated 7h bike split. I got lots of shouts from the Irish as they passed me, but as I hadn't seen anyone from LTC I figured they were ahead.

On the second Bike loop the temperatures were rising, I had slowed down but I stuck to my HR plan. My feet were burning from about 4.5 hours in, so I poured water over them to try to ease it. A 1km or more cobbled section though one of the villages was fun the first time, but on the second loop I felt every cobble and it really tested the bike mechanics. I could hear some noise from the back and decided to have a look while riding (I may as well be looking at a pot of Spaghetti for all I know about bikes) which led to a collision with a small bollard. This shook me and I was lucky not to fall. I took some caffeine to wake myself up.



I rolled into T2 after 6:03 and handed my bike to a volunteer. I couldn't believe my split and again took my time in transition putting on more sun cream. The run course was 4 x 10km and I headed out with the plan to steady the HR, and run as much as I could until I met my husband and kids who had flown in that morning. There was super support out on the

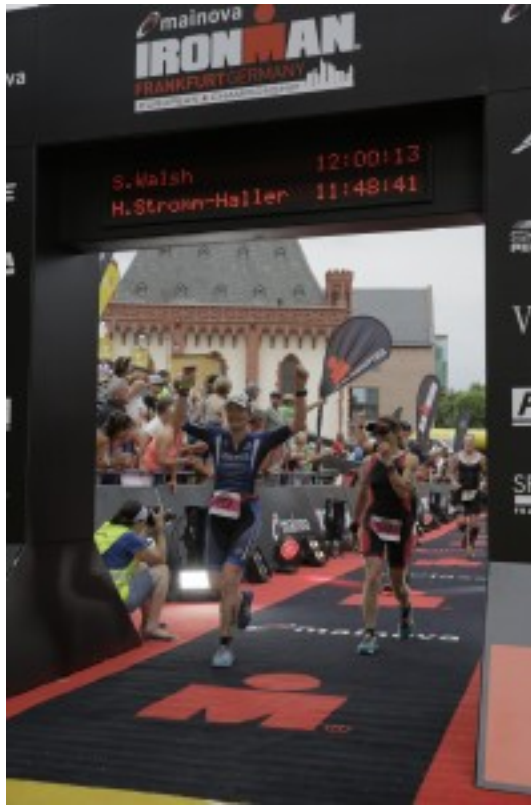
course and lots of aid stations. I tried to keep cool using the showers and putting ice down my top. Every mat I passed over, I could picture friends and family tracking me at home, ticking off the kilometers. After 2 loops the tears came again, as I realised I only had to 20km more to go. I had taken my rings off and wore shoes 2 sizes up, to cope with the heat. My hands were so swollen that I couldn't bend my fingers very much, and I got a bit worried so put them in ice baths for a few seconds at the aid stations. It was the 3rd lap before I found John & the kids, and this gave me a huge lift. They were expecting me to be in bits and I wasn't - I hit off for the last 15km.



This was the toughest part. I had been drinking coke and Iso, and having the odd jelly, I didn't stop, but was walking more and it just felt hard. My feet were soaked from the showers and my runners felt heavy. I hadn't seen any of the lads, although John saw Keith and Phil so I figured they had overtaken me when I was in the portaloo. On the 4th lap I chatted to Susan from Pulse, and she gave me my swim split as 1:03 (I had forgotten to ask John) and my tiring brain added 1 + 6, I figured if I was under 6 hours on the Marathon it would be a 13hour finish - brilliant. As I collected my final band and had 3km to go, I allowed myself to check my run time and was shocked to see I had been out only 4:20. Well now I decided I owed it to myself and all those in my heart to run home. So I did.

The finish shoot was emotional, high five's all the way; in the Grandstand my name was being called by the Limerick and other Irish supporters, and I stopped by to kiss and hug John, Conal and Orlaith. I have no idea if they said 'Sinéad Walsh - you are an Ironman' but I

looked up and saw 12 so knew I done way better than I had hoped. It was over and hour later that I found out my finish time, and it still hasn't quite sunk in.



I enjoyed every thing about the event and the weekend - the course, the atmosphere, the city and its people. The early mornings, rainy spins and missed nights out of the last 6 months were so worth it. I tried to not let the IM take over my life, and I think I succeeded.

I could not have done this without the support of my husband, children, parents, brothers and sisters. Thanks to my friends and neighbours for help with pickups and matches, even though I am sure they thought what I was doing was crazy. The encouragement, advice and support from my great friends in Limerick TC has been amazing, míle buoichas (if I name anyone I am sure to omit someone so I won't). The messages before and after have been really special.

Thanks to Ken, Keith, Mike and Philip for the banter, laughs and support.

I am privileged and grateful to have been able to do this, I dedicate my achievement to those we know whose lives were too short – all ways in our hearts.

It is a cliché (and the tag line of the huge multinational corporation that is IRONMAN) but 'Anything is possible'. If anyone wants to know more please get in touch.

And, yes I hope to do it all again - when asked if she would like to go to another IM with her mother, Orlaith replied with the confidence only a 9 year old has, that she would like Austria, and of course 'Koma'.