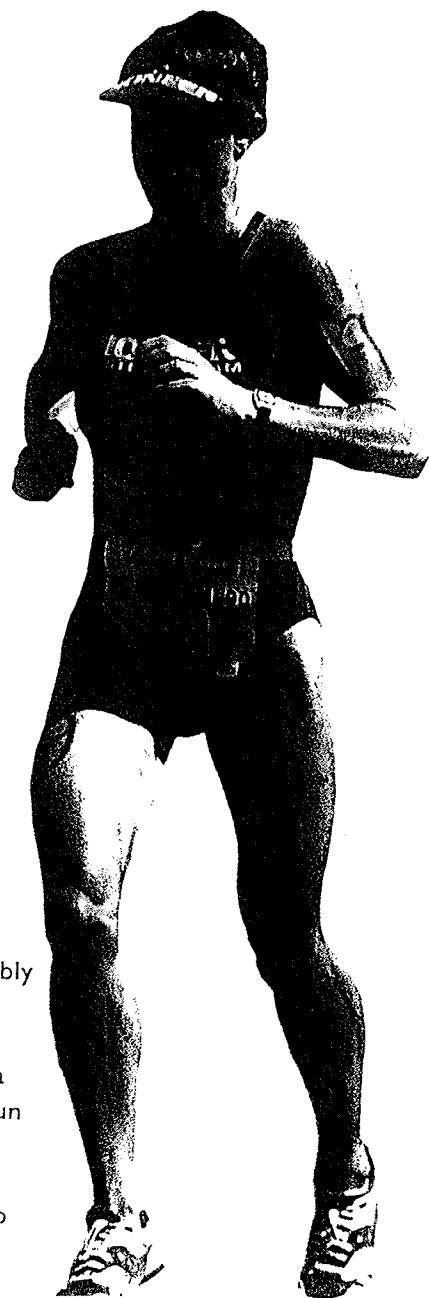


TRIPLE ACTION



Feeling a little wobbly at first, runners hope for a smooth run and they look forward to the finish.

T

he year was 1978. It was a beautiful summer day in Hawaii (as most Hawaiian days are). Sitting in a park overlooking a sandy, white beach were three friends—a swimmer, a runner, and a bicyclist. But on this day the friends were arguing. What about? They were arguing about who was the toughest athlete.

“Why not put all three sports together for a race?” suggested one of the men. “The one who wins is certainly the toughest athlete.” They agreed.

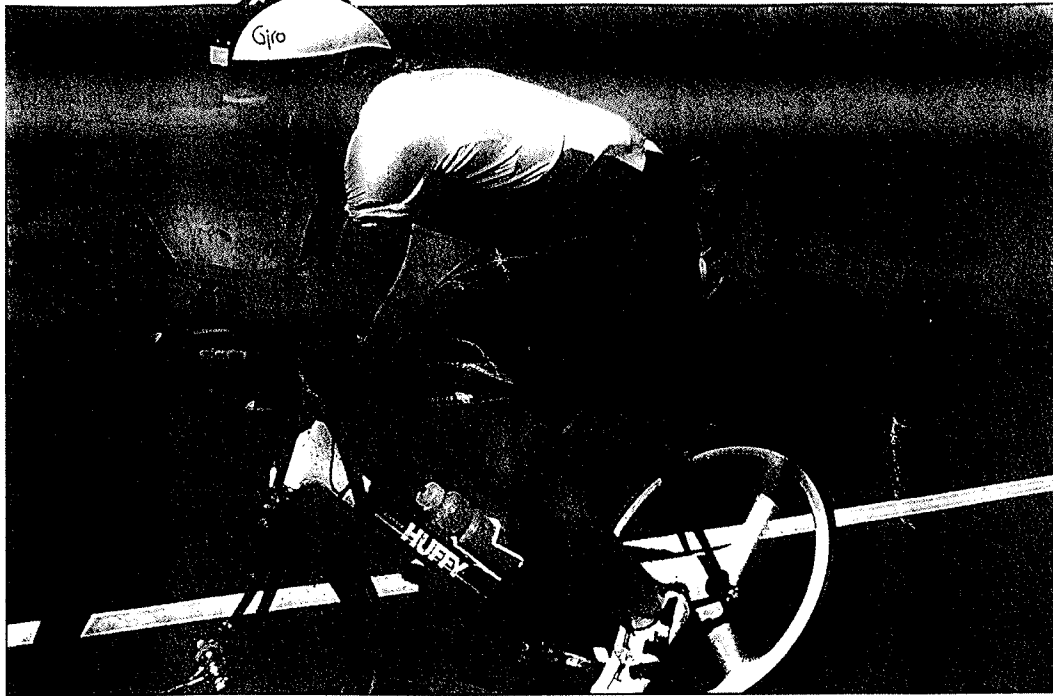
So the three men organized a race that included swimming, biking, and running. In total, the race would cover 33 miles. When the big day arrived, 14 people showed up to compete. The swimmer won.

Does this sound like a crazy and impossible race? Well, some people might consider it crazy, but it sure isn't impossible. In fact, millions of men, women, and children are getting into this super new sport. They are called triathletes, and the three events make up a sport called a triathlon.

Push Yourself

Why do these athletes take on such a grueling test of strength and endurance? “It's the ultimate challenge,” says one triathlete. “And it's great because you get to jump in the water, hop on your bike, and then go for a run.”

Triathlete Sue Ogrocky of Cincinnati competes in triathlons for a different reason. “I like to see how far I can push myself.” What exactly does doing a triathlon involve? In most races, competitors swim for .9 miles, and bike for 25 miles. Then, without taking a rest, they run for 6.24 miles.



Considered the hardest part of the race, the bike ride is the longest stretch.

Triathletes have come up with an even harder race—the Ironman! In this super triathlon, athletes swim 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles, and then run 26.2 miles. Wow!

You've probably already figured out that most triathletes have to be in awesome shape. But most of them don't start out that way. It takes a lot of training to become competitive. And most athletes are usually weak in one or two of the events when they start. Super-triathlete Mike Pigg remembers his first days in the sport. "I wasn't really fast, I only swam for fun, and I had never biked before in my life!" But Mike got into the hard training. He began by riding a bike to school every day. He swam in a nearby lake and ran track at school. His training paid off! Mike came in in second in his age group (15–19-year-olds) in his very first triathlon.

Just for the Fun of It

Someone has to win in a triathlon. And for many people, that's their goal. But that's not the reason most athletes enter a race. "You're competing against yourself," points out a frequent triathlon entrant. "It's really O.K. to be in the middle of the pack. In fact, it's O.K. to be the last person coming in."

Mike Pigg agrees. "Sure, you want to do your best, but you don't have to be the top dog. You're out there for fun."

Check It Out

Not For Adults Only

Never to be outdone by adults, kids are also getting in on the triathlon craze. In New Zealand the sport is already looking to the future by sponsoring triathlon training camps for kids ages 5 to 13. Some 6,000 kids have taken part in the sport.

How about you? Would you be interested in training for a triathlon? Which event would be the hardest for you? Which would be the easiest?



Triple Action

48

1. What are the competitors called that compete in a triathlon?

Triathletes

2. What 3 sports compose a triathlon?

Swimming, cycling, and running

3. What is the Iron man?

A triathlon that is 140.6 miles long

4. How did Mike Pigg do in his first triathlon?

5. Why do most people enter a triathlon?

To stay fit and healthy

6. What's happening in New Zealand?

7. How many kids have taken part?

8. What is considered the hardest parts of the race?

9. Can women participate in a triathlon?

10. Why does Sue Ogrocky compete?