

# MOVE ANY MOUNTAIN

WHEN AN IRONMAN JUST ISN'T ENOUGH, THE FAST-GROWING GENRE OF MOUNTAIN TRIATHLONS ARE A SPELLBINDING WAY OF PUSHING THE BODY TO THE MAX. HERE WE HIGHLIGHT THE APPEAL OF HITTING THE PEAKS... AND PICK FOUR OF THE GREATEST MOUNTAIN TRIS

WORDS NICK BUSCA IMAGE JOSÉ LUIS HOURCADE



A solo athlete battles one of the Swissman Xtreme Triathlon's many hairpins

**W**hen sports fans hear the name of the French ski resort of Alpe d'Huez, their mind will invariably go to the famous 21 hairpin turns that have helped build the myth and the glory of the Tour de France. Similarly, if you think of Austria's sporting capital of Kitzbühel, it'll be the most challenging and dangerous downhill of the FIS Ski World Cup. But in the last 10 years, many mountain resorts have increasingly become popular as the ultimate triathlon locations.

'Kitz' has been part of the ITU calendar since 2006. It hosted the 2014 European Championships and, in June 2017, both pro and age-group triathletes will return to the small Tyrolean town for the standard leg of the 2017 European Championships. Located 700m above sea level, Kitzbühel isn't even one of the highest mountain triathlons of the scene. Nevertheless, the scenery and the location play their part to make it challenging, and you have to be ready to compete in any kind of weather.

"It's a lovely place, the air is clean and the lake fresh," says Stuart Hayes, winner of the 2010 ITU World Cup event in Kitzbühel and 2012 Olympian, to 220. "The race is unique because it's tough and always a challenge. The altitude has a little influence but you have to be fit for this kind of race. The temperatures can be cold and the weather very unpredictable. You have to be prepared for anything."

### TOUR MYTHOLOGY

With 39% of athletes coming from abroad (17% from England, the most represented foreign country), France's Alpe d'Huez Triathlon is the most famous mountain triathlon event on the calendar.

"Alpe d'Huez is magical," recalls Tim Don, Britain's 2006 ITU World Champ and the winner of Alpe's short race in 2011. "The history of cycling is fantastic. It's a long climb so you have to ride your own pace, because if you ride too hard you'll pay for the last 5km of the climb or on the run. I wanted to test myself and a mountain triathlon is an amazing test to do that."

For the 10th edition of the race in 2015, entries for the long-distance rose 21% compared to 2014 (and up 24% for the short edition). Eleven thousand nights were sold in the Alpe d'Huez area between apartments, hotels and camping, with an average €280 budget per athlete and an estimated €1.6m overturn for the resort. So the financial benefits for the traditional ski resorts are clear.

The 2002 ITU Long Distance World Champion, Cyrille Neveu, has been at the head of the race organisation since 2006. The secret of the race's success among British triathletes, according to Neveu, resides in its mythic cycling stature. "Its wild environment on the mountains, its difficulty and the cycling mythology behind it, make the race very popular," he says. "The English population (43% of the foreign athletes) are more used to travelling than others, they know France very well from the winter season and they normally search for these legendary places and adventures. We're very used to receiving them here and we're very close to the main airports, too."

### PEAK PERFORMANCE

Many other mountain resort triathlon events are now filling the triathlon calendars, with the French classic Embrunman being one of the forerunners. Annecy-Semroz (the penultimate stage of Le Tour in 2014) also organises an Olympic-distance race in July each year that follows the Tour's roads; while the Altriman in the Pyrenees - boasting some 5,000m of climbing on the bike alone - is carving itself a reputation as one of the toughest long-distance triathlons in the world.

From next September, Italy will join the club with the world's highest swim and bike start at the 1,800m altitude of Livigno, while Switzerland and Austria have also taken the tri way - with the Swissman and Austria eXtreme both taking the Ironman distance and stretching it over gruelling bike climbs and ultra run hikes.

In the UK, meanwhile, the toughest triathlon events have little to envy of the main races in the Alps. If you sign up for one of the Brutal events (even the Half would be enough to make - or ruin - your day), the Celtman or Helvellyn, you already know that you have to be prepared for anything. And that your day will be darn long. Time then to turn overleaf for some of Europe's greatest mountain triathlons... and how you can climb your way to success. ➡



# AUSTRIA EXTREME TRIATHLON

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF... GROANING, GEARS CLUNKING AND SCRAMBLING UP ROCKS. WELCOME TO THE AUSTRIA EXTREME, ONE OF THE TOUGHEST 226KM DAYS ON PLANET EARTH...

IMAGES AUSTRIA EXTREME, KLICKCHICK PHOTOGRAPHY

STATS		
 <b>15:31</b> MEDIAN TIME (HRS)	 <b>3,923M</b> BIKE ASCENT	 <b>1,910M</b> Dachstein-Südwand-Hütte MAX ALTITUDE
	 <b>1,863M</b> RUN ASCENT	

**W**hile it may include an extra vowel to the Xtreme family of the Norseman, Celtman and Swissman, the comparisons between that famous trio and the Austria eXtreme are understandable.

The Graz-set long-distance race starts with a 3.8km swim in the 14°C Mur river, followed by a point-to-point 186km bike containing 3,900m of vertical gain and a 43.6km 'run' with 1,900m of climbing, which finishes at the foot of the Dachstein glacier in the North of Styria.

As in the Swissman on p50 (that also sees you travel across nearly half a country), in order to be fully awarded as a finisher you

must hike the last section with your support crew and cross the finishing line with them. Simply, the Austria eXtreme - which has just 125 race slots chosen by a lottery - is an event that closes the gap between a normal triathlon and a wild adventure. And finisher t-shirts don't come much rarer than this...

	<b>DATE</b> » 24 June 2017
	<b>LOCATION</b> » Graz, Austria
	<b>DISTANCES</b> » 3.8km swim/186km bike/43.6km run
	<b>NEAREST AIRPORT</b> » Graz <b>WEBSITE</b> » <a href="http://www.autxtri.com">www.autxtri.com</a>

## EXTERMINATE THE EXTREME!

Here are some surefire ways to conquer the eXtreme from 2015 winner Michael Strasser

### SKIP ALTITUDE

I didn't do real altitude training. The race isn't super high: the max is 1,910m. At this time all of the athletes have other problems than dealing with altitude.

### WINDPROOFING

Make sure you choose to pack a windproof bike jacket. It'll especially be needed on the long downhill sections on the bike course.

### KEY KIT

Bring a big pack of mental fitness! The race has four mountains on the bike - and headwinds. So don't bring a disc wheel, but do take a low-gear cassette.

# THE BRUTAL HALF

STATS		
		
<b>10:43</b>	<b>1,513M</b>	<b>1,085M</b>
MEDIAN TIME (HRS)	BIKE ASCENT	Snowdon MAX ALTITUDE
		
<b>920M</b>		
RUN ASCENT		

WE CHOSE ITS BIG BROTHER AS THE TOUGHEST IRON IN THE WORLD IN ISSUE 322, BUT, WITH A CLIMB UP MOUNT SNOWDON, THE HALFLING ISN'T TO BE SNIFFED AT EITHER. HERE'S THE ESSENTIAL BREAKDOWN...

**S**et in the picturesque and dramatic scenery of Llanberis in Snowdonia, northern Wales, the Half Brutal is the shortest brother of the increasingly (in)famous Brutal family, which also includes the full 226km length and a double.

The swim section takes place in the chilly Lyn Padarn lake's water (two laps). What follows is worth the race name: a two-lap bike with 1,524m of vertical gain in total, one 8km

lap of running around the lake to stretch the legs, and the final climb to the top of Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales... and a leg-sapping run back down again.

	<b>DATE</b> » 10 September 2016
	<b>LOCATION</b> » Llanberis, Wales
	<b>DISTANCES</b> » 1.9km swim/93km swim/23.6km run
	<b>WEBSITE</b> » <a href="http://www.brutalevents.co.uk">www.brutalevents.co.uk</a>

## BEAT THE BRUTAL!

2015 race winner Christopher Ward's top tips on banishing the Brutal Half

### KEY PREP

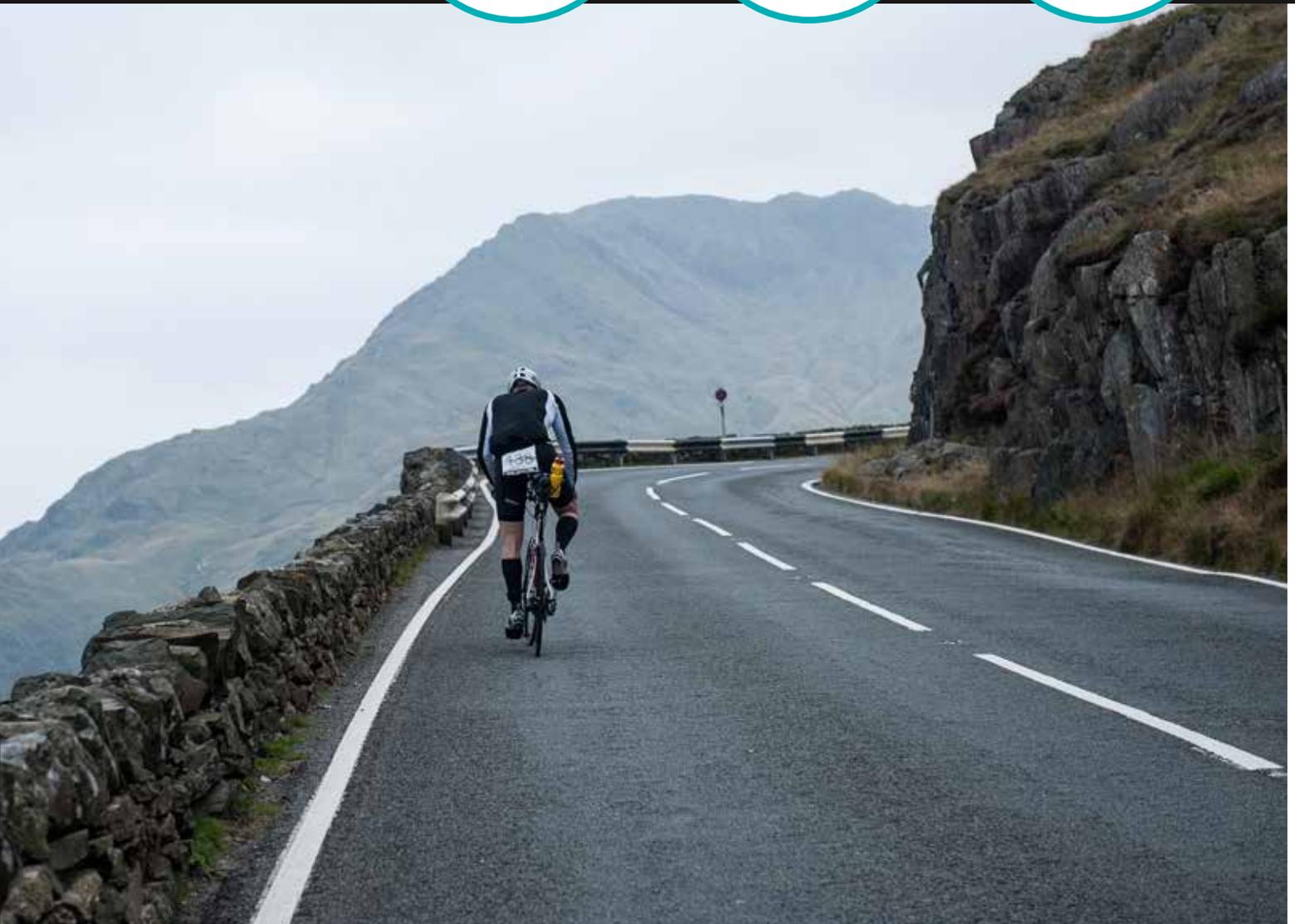
I planned the year based on climbing on the bike. I also did Alpe d'Huez Triathlon, many hill repetition sessions and went to Snowdonia for a recce of the bike and run courses.

### ESSENTIAL KIT

People use road bikes, but I used a TT and felt comfy. It's compulsory to have extra layers in case of bad weather. Use trail shoes with more grip as normal run shoes lack grip.

### FACE THE ELEMENTS

Be prepared to race in the wind and wet and bring clothes for all conditions. For the bike: long sleeves, a waterproof and arm warmers. For the run: waterproof jacket, hat and gloves.



# HELVELLYN

WELCOME TO HEL! WORD-OF-MOUTH HAS SEEN THIS EVENT BECOME A GENUINELY ICONIC RACE ON THE UK SCENE FOR OVER A DECADE, WITH THE CLIMBS OF 'THE STRUGGLE' AND HELVELLYN TWO OF UK TRI'S MOST FAMOUS RITES OF PASSAGE...

**KEY INFO**

**DATE**» 4 September 2016  
**LOCATION**» Ullswater, Cumbria  
**DISTANCES**» 1.6km swim/61.2km bike/14.5km run  
**WEBSITE**» www.trihard.co.uk

The distances of Helvellyn sit away from the trad conventions of the standard- or middle-distance genres, and for good reason: Helvellyn isn't your normal triathlon.

Long claimed to be the toughest course in the UK (a young Alistair Brownlee broke the course record in 2007), the legendary event begins with a wincingly cold swim in the calm waters of Ullswater Lake (the lap is shortened when the water temp is lower than 13°C). The 61.2km bike route is made legendary

by the appearance of 'The Struggle' over Kirkstone Pass at 44km. Climbing 400m in 5km, it's an absolute beast loaded with 20% ascents that can force even the most hardened and experienced of triathletes to push their steeds skywards.

The final 14.5km run route continues to pile on the punishment, reaching the peak of Helvellyn (at 950m, the third-highest point in England) before a hair-raising descent that's certainly no picnic either.

## STATS



**10:17**

**MEDIAN TIME (HRS)**



**745M**

**BIKE ASCENT**



**842M**

**RUN ASCENT**



**950M**

**MAX ALTITUDE**



IMAGE JASON NEWSOME

### HAMMER HELVELLYN!

Fancy taking on the toughest course in UK triathlon? Over to the brilliantly-named 2015 women's champ, Bonnie Van Wilkenburg, for her winning advice...

#### TRAINING TIPS

Don't overdo the mountain training, just train hard. But if you only road run, head to the Lake District to practise some trail running and up and down the mountains.

#### KIT OPTIONS

Bring a hydration backpack with water and food for the run, and make sure it's well-fitting. It's not the longest triathlon but it's very demanding.

#### SHOW RESPECT

Respect the mountains and the weather. Be aware that the mandatory kit is there for a reason and, if the weather changes, you can put on an extra layer.





For more incredible images from SWISSMAN, head to [220tri.com](http://220tri.com)

# SWISSMAN XTREME TRIATHLON

WITH A 16:16HR MEDIAN TIME, THE SWISSMAN IS ARGUABLY NOT JUST THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST MOUNTAIN TRIATHLON, BUT THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST TRIATHLON. SO READ ON IF YOU FANCY A LUNG-BUSTING DAY TO REMEMBER IN THE SWISS ALPS...

IMAGE JOSÉ LUIS HOURCADE

<b>STATS</b>		
	<b>3,339M</b> BIKE ASCENT	<b>4,436M</b> Furkapass MAX ALTITUDE
<b>16:16</b> MEDIAN TIME (HRS)		<b>1,594M</b> RUN ASCENT

**T**he idea is simple: is a conventional Ironman not enough? Then here's something more. First of all, the Swiss Alps scenery of the Swissman Xtreme is sublime and dramatic, with the possibility of experiencing all seasons and types of weather in a single day (snow included).

As part of the Xtreme triathlon races, Swissman Xtreme - along with its Celtman and Norseman siblings - is definitely one of the hardest and most beautiful races in the world.

The point-to-point course starts with a 3.8km swim at Ascona near the Italian border before the 180km bike goes over three Alpine

passes to Brienz in central Switzerland. The run heads towards the majestic mountains of the Eiger, Mönch, Jungfrau and, finally, athletes climb to the foot of the Jungfrau glacier with their support crew. So, if you're looking for your ultimate ride, then this could be what you've been waiting for. ■ **220**

	<b>DATE</b> » 24 June 2017
	<b>LOCATION</b> » Ascona, Switzerland
	<b>DISTANCES</b> » 3.8km swim/180km bike/42km run
	<b>NEAREST AIRPORT</b> » Lugano
<b>KEY INFO</b>	<b>WEBSITE</b> » <a href="http://www.suixtri.com">www.suixtri.com</a>

**SMASH THE SWISSMAN!**  
Here are the top tips from three-time Swissman podium star, Germany's Julia Nikolopoulos

**TRAINING TIPS**  
For bike training, you need to do a lot of climbing and riding downhill. For the run it's a good thing to train for the uphill, but the muscles also need to be prepared for the downhill.

**KEEP EATING**  
Don't forget to eat during the race. You need a lot of energy for this (especially if it's cold) and having a bonk here is no fun.

**KIT CHOICES**  
When I travel to Switzerland I take all my gear and winter clothes: jacket, rain jacket, rain trousers, hat, gloves. Be prepared to wear extra layers of clothes.

**MORE MOUNTAIN FUN** A further quartet of high peak Euro action to pit your wits against...

**EMBRUNMAN, 15 AUGUST 2016**  
The Godfather of the mountain tri scene and a race with over 30 years of history. Set in the Hautes-Alpes in southern France, the race features over 4,000m of climbing over its 230km course.

**CELTMAN, JUNE 2017**  
Scotland's Torridon mountains have been the setting for this 248km ultra toughie since 2012. Cold Atlantic waters, jellyfish, over 4,000m of ascent and a mountain trail run are all present.

**ALTRIMAN, JULY 2017**  
"A bear could eat (and digest) you before the next racer comes by," says reader Chris Fernandez of this small in numbers (220) and high on ascent (5,720m total), long-distance Pyrenees event.

**ALPE D'HUEZ, JULY 2017**  
Another granddaddy of the mountain tri scene. The 2.2km swim/115km bike/22km run race has been sending triathletes up the iconic Tour de France mountain climb since 2002.