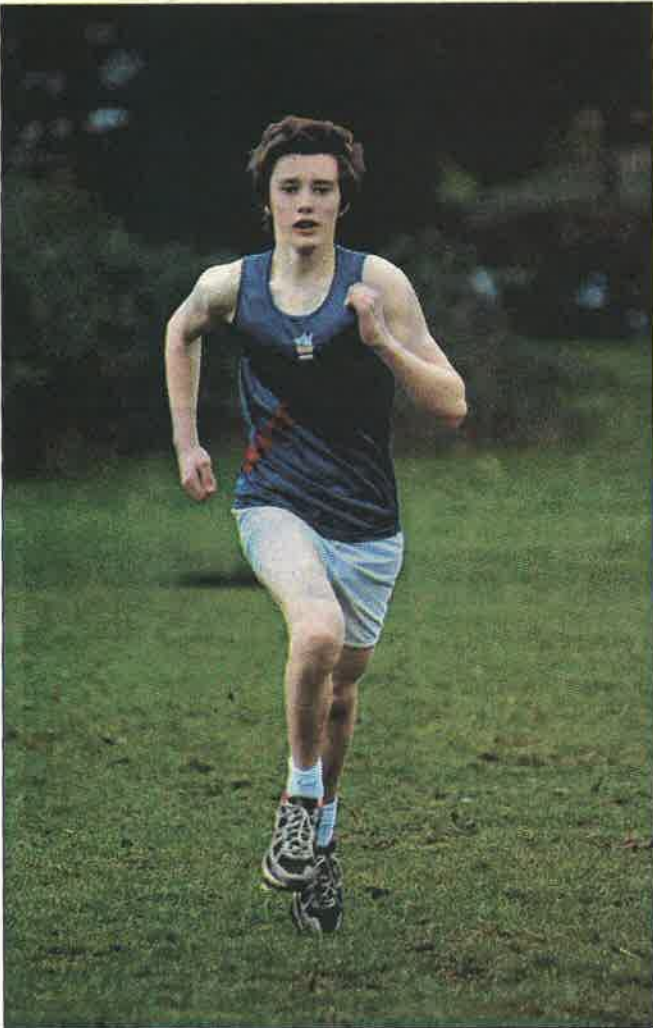


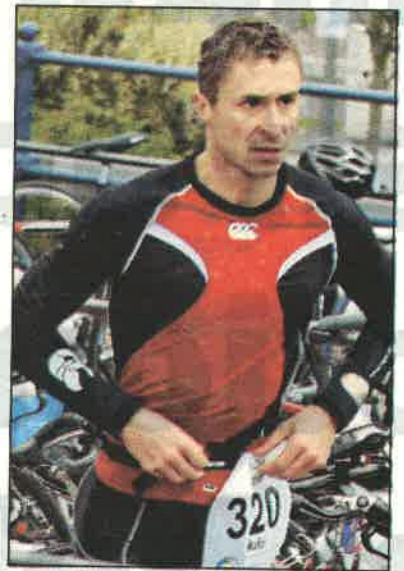
Things to do in Sevenoaks...

10 CHRONICLE April 16, 2009

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ON THE RUN: Dan Bryant, 16, in training. He will be competing against a different member of his family in each leg



Sunday

EARLY START: Triathletes will be descending on Sevenoaks for the annual triathlon competition. The first wave of competitors are expected to dive in to the leisure centre pool at 6.30am for a 14-length swim. These exertions will be followed by a gruelling 25k cycle ride and an 8k run through Knole Park. The last person is expected to cross the line back at the leisure centre at around 11.15am with presentations expected to take place from 11.30am.



READY TO ROLL: A competitor in the 2008 Sevenoaks Triathlon dashes past the rows of bikes lined up

Athletes to master to endure challenge

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"THE WEATHER is a barrier, not an excuse," said Claire Hitchings firmly. Then she giggles.

"But actually, it's been lovely, having sunny evenings to train, with all the spring flowers. Magical."

There are only days to go to the Sevenoaks Sprint Triathlon, and our local triathletes are getting themselves into peak condition.

For 29-year-old Adam Wisdom, being in any kind of condition at all is a triumph.

Having pulled a hamstring in the middle of Knole Park, he's managed to resume training just in time.

"It's not your fitness that goes," he tells me. "It's your speed. Unless you train regularly you lose your edge."

He's used his enforced rest to put together a website, reporting on the progress he and training partner Robin Barnes are making towards their Ironman attempt in the autumn, providing a place to make donations.

"My employer has been very flexible," he says. "They let me work mornings and evenings, so I can have the afternoon off to train."

For Kemsing's Claire Hitchings, arranging training time is more complicated.

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Someone has to look after seven-month-old Jamie.

With her husband Anthony's parents now in Australia, Claire has been driving over to her own parents in Haywards Heath.

"Also Anthony's Godmother, Ann, has been having him twice a week," she said.

"Sometimes I feel guilty to be leaving him with others rather than looking after him every minute, but he gets tons of love and attention, and family can play with him without me looking over their shoulders.

"And to be honest, I love the 'Me' time – a chance not to be constantly worried as you are with a young child.

"When I train, it recharges my batteries."

Claire has to contend with issues with which other women will sympathise – the demands of breast-feeding, and nights of broken sleep.

"Jamie's never slept through the night," she admits. "But just recently he's started to sleep till 6am. Hooray!"

It seems only fair that her preparations allow her to eat what she likes.

"I need 1,000 calories a day extra, to make up for feeding the baby and the demands of training.

"It means I have lots and lots of fruit crumble. And full-calorie Coke."

Does she have to monitor her weight?

"Not really. If you weigh yourself once a month and it's roughly the same, there's nothing to worry about."

(Read that and weep, fellow women of Sevenoaks.)

Before the Sevenoaks event, Claire is taking part in two events that may further her chances of competing for Britain in her age group.

"The amazing thing is how fast she is," said Martin Brown, who is an event committee member.

"Baby or not, she's amazingly quick."

Things are going fairly smoothly with the planning, according to Martin, who's one of the event organisers.

"Last year, we had an 11th-hour panic with the metal racking for the bikes.

"We were worried about rust, so we had the racking galvanised. When we came to put the stands together, we realised that the galvanising had clogged up the threads. "Several of us had to spend a couple of weekends stripping them down so the racks would work."

This year, there's an obvious hazard to contend with. We all know about it.

Potholes.

The cycle course goes along many country lanes which are riddled with holes.

"We've done two very good recksies of the bike route," said Martin.

"There are some really terrible holes. They're really not what you want someone to encounter when they're on a bike at speed, especially when it's a £1,000 bike.

"We've asked Kent Highways about it, but had no response.

"However," he adds mysteriously, "we have a plan."

Roadworks, he believed, will not be a problem, although it's not unknown for a new set of roadworks to be thrown up without warning.

Two weeks ago, organisers ran the route to check for hazards.

The route itself has to be marked out for competitors, so on the day of the event, volunteers will set out in the early hours to arrange the signs.

"There's a real sense of excitement about the race," says Martin.

"Something is changing in Sevenoaks. There was a 10K run in town recently, where 600 people turned up, and gridlocked central Sevenoaks.

"Perhaps people are taking up fun exercise like running and cycling, to get away from the stress of working life in the current economic climate.

"We're certainly aware of how much people are looking forward to April 19."

Sixteen-year-old Dan Bryant is one of those in the excitement zone.

He's been training hard in preparation for taking on his whole family.

"He comes cycling with us dads at 7.30am on a Sunday morning," says Martin.

"He's on his mountain bike and we're on our flashy dad machines, and he leaves us for dead on the hills."

So fit and determined is Dan, that he's thinking of taking on a half Ironman event next year.

"It might be a bit daft, at my age," he says, "but I'd like to try.

"The headmaster at my old school said a strange thing to me once. He said 'One day you'll be an Ironman'.

"I don't think he meant Ironman competitions, but it stuck in my head."

"When I train, it recharges my batteries."

Claire Hitchings, triathlete

"There are some terrible holes. They're not what you want to encounter on a bike at speed."

Martin Brown, triathlon organiser

three events of triathlon

Who knows how many Ironmen Sevenoaks will produce?

A very small Iron Tot may well be watching the race.

"We have a little bike seat for Jamie," says Claire. "And a tiny helmet."

"We're looking forward to taking him round Knole."

"If he turns out to be someone who doesn't like sporty things, I don't know what we'll do."

■ Dan Bryant will be taking on his mum Alison, dad Richard and younger brother Jamie at swimming, cycling and running respectively.

Cheer him on against the combined might of his family.

Sponsor Dan for his trip to help in a Mongolian orphanage next year.

Contact him at danieljamesbryant@yahoo.co.uk, or call him on 01732 462415.

■ Check out Adam Wisdom's website at www.ironmad.co.uk and sponsor him on behalf of the British Heart Foundation.



FIT FOR PURPOSE: Triathlon contestant Claire Hitchings, from Kemsing, gets training



COME ON: The crowd cheers on competitors in the Sevenoaks Triathlon last year

What is ironman?

IRONMAN competitions are gruelling endurance versions of a triathlon.

An Ironman event is likely to consist of 3.8km swimming, 180km cycling, and a 42km run.

The concept of Ironman started in Hawaii, where a cyclist, a runner and a swimmer argued over who had the biggest lung capacity.

The first event was held in February 1979, and the jury's still out as to which sport creates the best lung capacity.

Triathlon facts

THE SEVENOAKS Sprint Triathlon will be held on Sunday, starting from Sevenoaks Leisure Centre.

The competition starts at 6.30am, and it will all be over by lunchtime.

■ A sprint race usually consists of a 750m swim, a 20km cycle, and 5km run.

The Sevenoaks run goes through Knole Park and returns up the killer steep path.

■ Triathlon started in 1974,

and began with a group of friends training together.

The group contained swimmers, cyclists and runners, and eventually they began to hold competitions combining all three sports.

■ Belonging to a club is an excellent way to get more involved in triathlon.

There are around 350 affiliated triathlon clubs in Great Britain.

They range in size from five

or six members to more than 100. Clubs can cater for all levels of ability and experience, and either have their own coach or access to one.

However, you don't have to take part in all three sports to join a triathlon club and enjoy training with others.

■ The London Triathlon will take place on August 1 and 2.

London's musical half-marathon event, Run To The Beat, takes place on September 27.