Triathlon competitors prove

GOING FOR IT: A runner gives it her all at the Sevenoaks Triathlon on Sunday

CHRISTINE MACKINNON
reporters@sevenoaks-chronicle.co.uk

ANYONE walking their dog in Knole Park on Sunday morning might have been surprised to see someone sprinting past who looked surprisingly like Formula One racing driver Jenson Button. The resemblance was uncanny, because it was Jenson Button.

The Grand Prix star was taking part in the Sevenoaks Triathlon, organised by the 7oaks Tri Club.

Starting at 6.30am the event saw more than 250 competitors swimming, cycling and running on a decidedly chilly and misty morning.

For many of us, the Triathlon was an unknown event until the 2000 Sydney Olympics, where the event was staged, spectacularly, around Sydney Harbour.

It's now a sport with 10,000 registered members in Britain, and over 650 events held each year.

The Sevenoaks event is known in the triathlon world as one of the hardest sprint races of the year.

"It's tough because of the steep hills," says competitor Dave Willumson. "It's also very well organised; Sevenoaks puts on a great race."

The good organisation has involved a very early start for some.

"We came down on Saturday night to set up the bike racks in the Leisure Centre car park," says Martin Brown, a committee administrator.

"Unfortunately, there was a boxing event taking place, and we couldn't get in to do our stuff. So we had to get up at 3.30 this morning to unpack the racks and put them together."

The Gas Board also caused a panic.

"They wanted to erect temporary traffic lights in the High Street," says Martin. "We managed to persuade them not to."

Since the event depends on carefully timed stages, it's easy to see that having the cyclists stop at lights would scupper the whole system.

The triathlon consists of 16 lengths of Sevenoaks Leisure Centre's main pool, a 27km cycle through Hildenborough and Shipbourne, and an 8km run through Knole Park.

Each stage is timed via a chipped ankle band on the competitor's ankle, and a timing pad that registers them running over it.

Transitions – the changeover from one stage to another – must be done as quickly as possible.

In the transition area, hundreds of bikes are slung over racks.

A Volkswagen Golf is bizarrely nested in a line of bikes.

"Someone left their car there last night, despite the warnings," says Martin.

"If the owner should come back, they're going to find themselves an integral part of a major sporting event."

At 8.30am, a call comes in that a cyclist has crashed at the bottom of Riverhill. A car sets off to pick him up.

"Luckily, there are lots of doctors who are members of 7oaks Tri," says Martin.

Within minutes, an eye-wincingly grazed and bleeding man is deposited outside the leisure centre. Somehow he's managed to scrape an armpit. It turns out later that he has 20 per cent skin burns.

EARLY STARTER: Martin Brown, a committee administrator, for 7oaks Tri Club

At 9.20am Jenson Button sprints out of the swimming pool to find his bike.

"They made me do two extra lengths," he protests, grinning.

The finish line is furnished with an inflatable arch.

At 9.45am it collapses and there is a struggle to drag it out of the way of returning runners.

After a while, they manage to inflate it again.

"It's brand new," says Martin. "We're still getting the hang of it."

A lot of things about 7oaks Tri Club are brand new, including most of the committee.

In one of those turbulent periods to which committees are prone, most of the previous officers resigned, and the new officers found themselves with three months to learn how to organise a large-scale sporting event.

"It's actually been great," says Gez Brown, the new chairman. "Everyone has worked as a team. We've managed to solve every drama."

Jenson Button sprints past in mirror shades. Honda will be relieved he's survived the bike stage without damaging his braking foot.

(David Coulthard will be equally pleased – the two Brits crashed at the Bahrain Grand Prix, effectively ending the chances of both.)

David, finishing in an excellent time, has a small revelation to make about the running stage where the route descends Webbs Alley and circumnavigates Knole House.

"Quite a few people are walking in the park," he confides. "It's a very big hill."

Whether they've walked or not, all the athletes arrive back at the finishing line with impressive vim.

"The great thing about the triathlon," says David, "is that it's absolutely not for elite athletes only. The people here today are all shapes and sizes."

At 42, David, who lives in Sevenoaks, has been a triathlete for nearly 20 years. He got his bike in 1991 as an engagement present.

"It's a great healthy lifestyle," he says. "As a role model for kids, it certainly beats throwing down the beers."

David's own children, aged eight and 10, have already taken part in "kiddy" triathlons in Swanley.

These involve a 200m swim, a 3km bike ride, and a 1km run. At a time when the nation's children seem barely fit enough to walk to the chip shop for lunch, David's success perhaps shows that the Government needs to work on the parents first.

Jenson Button finishes in a respectable time. In fact, it turns out that he's come in 16th.

"This is my first proper triathlon," he tells me. "I've done a couple in Lanzarote, but they

that three is the magic number

were fun rather than competitive. I like to train and I like to compete.

"Somehow," he admits, "I got the impression the course would be flatter than it was. There are some big hills round here."

How does he find the opportunity to train spending so much time in distant places?

"It's not easy," he says, "especially the cycling. When I'm home in Monaco, we cycle a lot on a ride called the Col de la Madone. It helps with fitness, and it's great to do something like this where it's all down to me, and not me and the 600 people in the team."

He's off to Barcelona in the morning, for the next F1 event. Is David Coulthard still talking to him after Bahrain?

"Oh, yes," he says. "We were just having a bit of fun."

I resolve to use this defence next time my parking is more approximate than usual.

He goes off to present the prizes. (If he'd run faster, he'd be presenting a cup to himself.)

David picks up a prize for coming second in the Vets event.

By 11.30am it's all over. If you had a lie-in, you would have missed the whole thing.

PV2004081_56

READY TO GO: A cyclist gets ready to ride at the triathlon

PV2004081_70

PILE UP: Competitors piled up their bikes at the transition area at the Sevenoaks Triathlon on Sunday

The 7oaks Tri Club

- The 7oaks Tri Club organises two events a year in April and September. It is always over-subscribed.
- New club members are always welcome; contact Griff Murphy on 020 7331 3351 or email him at memberrep@7oakstriclub.co.uk or look on www.7oakstriclub.co.uk
- Go along to a swimming session. The club runs four pool-based sessions a week.
- The club was grateful to receive over £9,000 from the National Lottery.
- Plans are under way to develop a children's programme.
- The winner of the Triathlon was Ben Ward of Larkfield AC.
- Jenson Button is currently 15th in the driver standings for the 2008 Formula One season.

Ladies tee it up at Knole Park

PAGE 43

SPORT INDEX

Poor Town exposed by Holmsdale 47
Otford continue promotion push 47
Chipstead go goal crazy 46
Boxing back in Sevenoaks 45
Van der Velde to conquer world 44

PV2004081_129

PV2004081_38

PV2004081_135

ON THE BUTTON: (left) Formula One superstar Jenson Button at the Sevenoaks Triathlon on Sunday; (right) further action from the spring event

Racing star turns out at triathlon

ED PEARSON

FORMULA One racing driver Jenson Button was the star attraction at the Spring Sprint Triathlon in Sevenoaks on Sunday.

The Honda Racing F1 star finished a very respectable 16th overall with a time of 1 hour 31 minutes and 21 seconds.

When asked why he chose to compete in triathlons the 28-year-old said: "I like to do this as it is all down to me, I don't have a team of 600 behind me and if I make a mistake, it's my fault!"

Triathlon training makes up part of Button's fitness regime for Formula 1, and also now helps fulfil his personal fitness challenges, although he did admit that he should have done some more course research as he thought wrongly the bike section of the race would be flat.

His split times were 6m:25s for the 400m swim, 7m:25s in transition, then he cycled 25km in 55m:05s at an average speed of 27kmph to finish transition two and the 8km run was completed for a total time of 91m:21s.

Button handed out prizes to the winners, including Ben Ward, the overall Men's winner, fresh from the New Zealand Iron Man last month.

For more results see page 43

THREE OF THE BEST: Sevenoaks Triathlon attracts more than 250 competitors on Sunday morning. The event is known as one of the hardest sprint races of the year.

PAGES 12 & 13

Results and Fixtures

Sevenoaks Triathlon

1, Ben Ward, 1:22:00; 2, Mark Yeoman, 1:24:38; 3, Richard Evans, 1:26:02; 4, Andrew Walker, 1:27:02; 5, Peter Robins, 1:27:21; 6, Rafal Medak, 1:27:26; 7, Andrew Walpole, 1:27:31; 8, Jonathan Streeter, 1:27:50; 9, Michael Evans, 1:28:05; 10, Keith Brown, 1:28:29; 11, Clive Weston, 1:28:36; 12, Dave Willumsen, 1:29:15; 13, Howard Dove, 1:30:20; 14, John Pitt, 1:30:40; 15, James Drain, 1:30:51; 16, Jenson Button, 1:31:21; 17, Steve Bush, 1:31:25; 18, Niki Treacy, 1:31:51; 19, Chris Neale, 1:32:08; 20, Paul Delicata, 1:32:31; 21, Neil Stanley, 1:32:54; 22, Neil Gear, 1:32:57; 23, Ron Evans, 1:33:04; 24, Ian Forrest, 1:33:14; 24, Ashley Howes, 1:33:34; 25, Rob Parry, 1:33:43; 26, Graeme Blair, 1:34:02; 27, Jodie Shann, 1:34:41; 28, Martin Kelly, 1:35:23; 29, Jonathan Molton, 1:35:37; 30, Ian Port, 1:36:00; 31, Phillip Crouch, 1:36:03; 32, Peter Gibson, 1:36:50; 33, Mark Haworth, 1:36:55; 34, Jonathan Greenwood, 1:36:58; 35, David Hallam, 1:37:32; 36, Ben Rawlinson ,1:38:01; 37, Kevin Brown, 1:38:31; 38, Dennis Warner, 1:38:41; 39, Richard Bushell, 1:38:46; 40, Carl Davis, 1:38:54; 41, David Willis, 1:38:55; 42, Stephen Payne, 1:39:05; 43, John Russell, 1:39:49; 44, Matt Aldridge, 1:39:53; 45, Robin Barnes, 1:39:59; 46, Mike Collier, 1:40:18; 47, Alistair Jones, 1:41:00; 48, Coralie Glaunes, 1:41:03; 49, Sarah Russell, 1:41:21; 50, Edward Andrews, 1:41:26; 51, James Griggs, 1:41:27; 52, Stuart Busby, 1:41:32; 53, Vic Weinberg, 1:41:37; 54, Rob Askew, 1:41:45; 55, Philipe Durand, 1:41:52; 56, James Ogilvie, 1:41:56; 57, Ewen Campbell, 1:42:15; 58, Jeroen Van Bezooyen, 1:42:28; 59, Chris Fitzgerald, 1:42:29; 60, Sam Perry, 1:42:36; 61, Peter Haigh, 1:43:08; 62, Mark Withecombe, 1:43:10; 62, Andrew Mead, 1:43:24; 64, Nigel Langley, 1:43:27; 65, Robbe Diriardo, 1:43:29; 66, Matthew Bright, 1:43:38; Derek Greenough, 1:43:43; 67, David Tibble, 1:43:43; 68, Richard Allenwell, 1:43:46; 69, Jonathan Towers, 1:43:46; 70, Niel Lee-Amies, 1:43:48; 71, David Goulden, 1:44:04; 72, Chis Hansen, 1:44:04; 73, Markus Panayi, 1:44:11; 74, Luis Herran, 1:44:23; 75, Cameron Jensen, 1:44:30;

FORMULA One ace Jenson Button was the centre of attention at Sevenoaks' Spring Sprint Triathlon.

The Honda driver, 28, uses triathlon events as part of his fitness regime for the gruelling F1 races.

He finished 16th in Sunday's triathlon with a time of 1hr 31min 21sec and handed out prizes to the winners at the end of the event.

Button said he liked competing in triathlons because he is responsible for all aspects of his race.

■ **See pages 12 & 13, plus Sport**