SEVENOAKS Chronicle

We follow three athletes training for the **triathlon**

PAGES 12-13

Money-saving vouchers to many local attractions

PAGE 60

THURSDAY APRIL 2, 2009

Reporting local life since 1881

visit our website www.thisiskent.co.uk/sevenoaks

65p

Triathletes gear up for major

CHRISTINE MACKINNON
reporters@sevenoaks-chronicle.co.uk

IN THE middle of this month a huge event will take place in the centre of Sevenoaks.

Hundreds of people will descend on the town in the early hours of the morning, erupt in a frenzy of activity, receive awards and go home.

It will all be over before most Sennockians have turned over in bed to switch off the alarm clock and think about making the first coffee of the day.

The Sevenoaks Sprint Triathlon is a big event in the world of British triathlon, and this year the planning has taken months.

It's been held since 1985 and has become one of the most popular events in the British triathlon world, largely because it is unusually challenging and also because the course is unusually beautiful.

Last year, the race attracted Formula One racing driver Jenson Button, who came in 16th overall and presented the prizes. This year, the race sold out within days.

BIG DREAMS: Triathlon contestant Claire Hitchings, from Kemsing, with her six-month-old son Jamie

Competitors will be coming from all far and wide on Sunday April 19 to swim, cycle and run around Sevenoaks.

"The great thing about the course is that it's very hilly, and it goes through some beautiful countryside," said organiser and member of Sevenoaks Tri Club Mike Clyne.

"A lot of triathlons take place in city environments or places which are a lot less attractive to be in than here."

The Sevenoaks Chronicle is tracking three local athletes as they prepare for the big challenge.

Claire Hitchings, 38, from Kemsing, is the mother of six-month-old Jamie.

For many of us, simply having a baby and caring for him full-time would be as much exercise as we could manage.

For Claire, a professional sports scientist, it was more a matter of slowing down briefly to give birth.

"I was doing Pilates an hour before Jamie was born. Well, he was earlier than expected."

Four weeks after the birth, Claire took part in a 10-mile cycling time trial.

Six weeks after that, she was first lady in the Sevenoaks Triathlon Club Hill Climb.

"Yes, there are a few practical problems," she admitted.

"Leaking boobs, for one thing. It's an incentive to go faster when I know my husband is waiting with a hungry baby.

"I'm lucky to have a very understanding husband."

She met her husband Anthony on a biking trip to Morocco. They were both enthusiastic cyclists.

In fact, when her in-laws offered to babysit Jamie so that she and Anthony could go out for their first post-baby meal, they decided instead to go out for a night-ride on their bikes.

"We went round Oldbury Woods with our night lights," said Clare.

After getting married and moving down from Leeds, she started triathlon training as a way to get out and meet people.

CHANGING TRACKS: Formula One driver Jenson Button at the Sevenoaks Sprint Triathlon last year

"They're going to do the three events as a relay," he said.

"Each of them will do the one they're best at. My mother's a good swimmer, my dad thinks he's good at cycling, and my brother will do the running.

"He's a very good runner and that's not my best event. I'm a bit worried."

Sport – pages 71 to 76

from Leeds, she started triathlon training as a way to get out and meet people.

"The lovely thing about triathlon is that all kinds of people can take part at any level they like.

"You get people on amazing, expensive bikes, and they're next to someone on a shopping bike.

"A lot of people don't compete at all but just come and swim, for example."

Claire hopes to represent Great Britain in the 2009 International Triathlon Union World Championships.

"It's not like the Olympics – it's a level down from that.

"I'd be competing in the 35-39 age group. How many sports allow you to compete for your country like this?"

Another athlete who might well be competing for his country before very long is **Dan Bryant, from Sevenoaks**. Dan, who is only 16 and a pupil at Judd School in Tonbridge, is already causing a stir.

He will be taking on his whole family in April.

running.

"He's a very good runner and that's not my best event. I'm a bit worried."

It was a holiday in the Lake District that sparked Dan's interest in cycling.

"I went there with my family and when we went cycling up and down the hills, I realised that I was getting up them and my family weren't."

When they got back, he started riding in the nearby Knole Park, and entered himself in a cyclecross competition.

"I came last, but I liked doing it, so I kept going through the winter, doing a little bit better each time.

"Eventually I managed to buy a better bike, and then I started to move up the placings."

Cycling is his favourite event, but he said he was good at that and proudly claimed to be faster than his mum.

"I have a coach, Simon Fraser, who helps me with running training after school," he added.

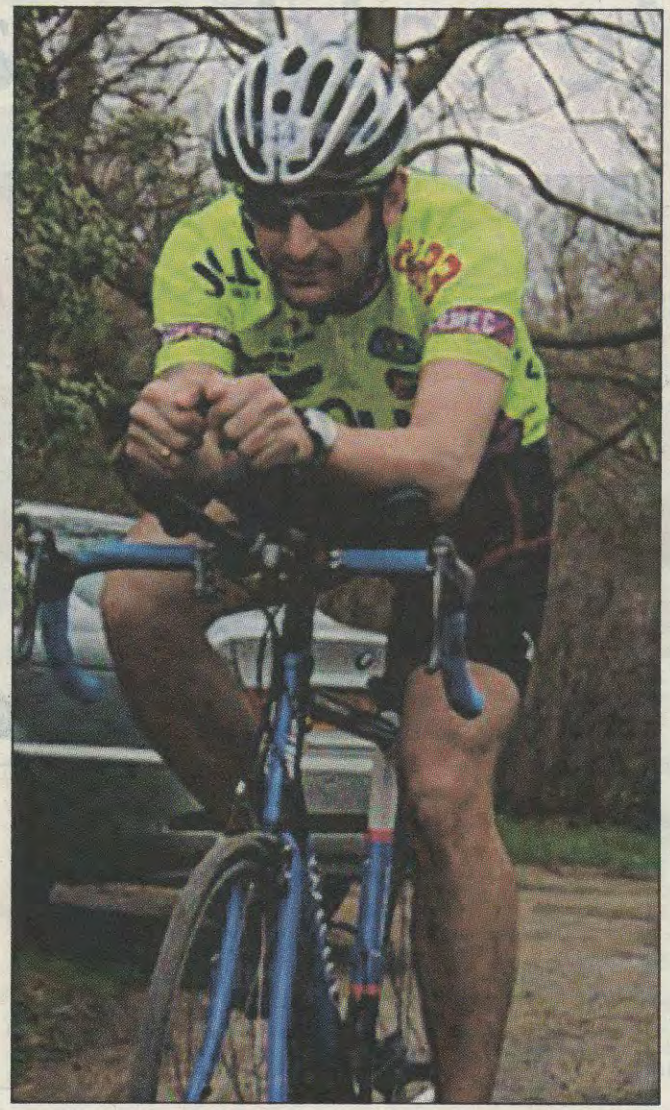
"I'm OK, but my younger brother Jamie is really good.

"That's going to be the very last event in the sprint triathlon and, honestly, I don't know how tired I'll be by then."

Dan has an extra ambition for his triathlon

event on the sport's calendar

PV2004081_38



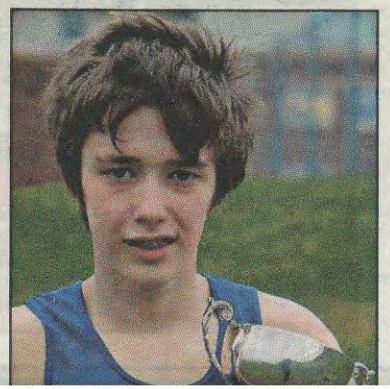
READY TO GO: Above and right, participants at last year's Sevenoaks Sprint Triathlon event

efforts. He's hoping to raise sponsorship for a charity trip to Mongolia in 2010.

"It involves trekking through Mongolia and working in an orphanage," he said.

"To get there, I need to raise £4,000 by July 2010. I'd be really pleased if anyone could offer to sponsor me for the triathlon, and I'm planning to share my photographs and experiences with sponsors."

Also, if anyone could muster a camera for 2010, he would be grateful for that



"Robin actually did pretty well. I finished about 100th, but I've come on a lot since then.

"We're still aiming for Ironman, possibly in Barcelona in the autumn," he said.

Adam is also running in aid of a charity that he holds dear.

"I'm hoping to raise money for the British Heart Foundation. Last year, my girlfriend underwent a four-hour operation to fix a rogue nerve in her heart. She's only 28 – a

Some facts about the Sevenoaks competition

- The Sevenoaks Sprint Triathlon will be held on Sunday April 19. The competition starts at 6.30am at the Sevenoaks Leisure Centre.
- Triathlon consists of swimming, cycling and running and the changeover between each is called the transition. Keen competitors dash out of the pool and set off on their bikes dripping wet.
- The Sevenoaks triathlon is a sprint race – meaning the sections are short, not fast.
- To sponsor Dan for his mission to Mongolia, you can contact him for further information on danieljamesbryant@yahoo.co.uk or call him on 01732 462415.
- To sponsor Adam and the British Heart Foundation, write him an email at the adamwisdom@hotmail.com

too.

There are not many people of Dan's age taking part in triathlons and it will be fascinating to see if he can beat the combined efforts of mum Alison, dad Richard and brother Jamie, 14.

WINNER: Sevenoaks Sprint Triathlon competitor Dan Bryant with one of his running trophies at last year's event

At Dan's age, injury is not a frequent issue – that's the preserve of the older athlete.

Battling injury, and time, is 29-year-old **Adam Wisdom, who lives near Borough Green**.

"I pulled a hamstring," he explained, "in the middle of Knole Park. Painful? Oh, yes. I just pulled up. My running partner, Robin Barnes, had to go off to the golf club and borrow one of their golf buggies to get me back."

Triathlon entered Adam's life only a year or so ago, when he and Robin sat in a pub and decided they would do an Ironman competition. Ironman is a form of triathlon that has competitors covering fearful distances over many hours.

"The Sevenoaks Triathlon last year was our first 'tri'.

teacher at Amherst School – so it shows how many people can be affected by heart problems.

"My company, the travel agent DialAFlight, has offered to double the amount of the sponsorship money we raise, so we hope to be able to make a fair bit for the British Heart Foundation."

At 6ft 5ins tall and weighing 14-and-a-half stone, Adam will be an interesting sight getting himself up the steeper hills.

"Swimming's my worst event," he said, "but last year I struggled to do 16 lengths for the triathlon swimming section, and now I can do hundreds of lengths in a session."

Will Adam's hamstring allow him to limp round the course?

Will Dan beat his whole family?

Will Claire make it round before the next feeding time?

We'll catch up with their progress again in two weeks' time.