

# Gillian McMahon - World Triathlon Championships Malaga 2024 - Race Report

October 26, 2024

## **World Triathlon Championships Malaga, Spain October 17-21st 2024**

### **Getting onto the Team**

After a good 2023 season, and hearing that the Worlds were taking place in Europe (Spain), I applied to compete for my age group. I heard back from TI in March 2024 that I was accepted as part of the Tri Team Ireland and I was over the moon!

The first step was to pay the registration fee and 3D kindly paid half of that! The second step was booking flights and accommodation. The very same day that I started looking for a place to stay in Malaga, the location was changed to nearby Torremolinos. Lucky for me, I managed to grab a hotel room very close to transition and in the middle of all the action! The next thing I did was to reserve a spot for my bike to go by truck with ETI Transport. A small bag was allowed to travel with my bike so that took some of the pressure off my suitcase. Even though I had competed at the World Champs five years previously (Switzerland) and had purchased an Irish trisuit for that event, the design had changed and so I had to buy a new one but it comes with your surname on it (which is so cool!) and took the sting out of the cost!

### **The Training**

All through the winter and spring, I structured my week around the Monday night club runs, Tuesday/Wednesday night club swims, Thursday strength class and Friday long bikes with my pal and previous 3D member Vanessa. This period was also speckled with some park runs with 3D members, occasional 'meet and train' runs in the phoenix park and turbo training on those wet and stormy days. During this stage, I was doing around 8 hours a week of training.

In April, I went to the Algarve for a 3D training camp organised by coach Sean. With the time and space to focus on training and in the company of like-minded club mates, this ended up being such fun and a great fitness boost! Those post-swim breakfasts with 'pao de deus' buns (aka clouds) and jokes about a certain female Irish open water swimmer are some of the best memories from that week!

May brought the 3D training weekend where I once again attempted to learn to mount my bike with the shoes on the pedals. After 14 years of doing triathlons (whaaaat!), I still had a mental block about this, partly because I am left foot dominant (goofy!), but this was going to be the year! The first Howth aquathlon took place this month too which is always a shock to the system! At this stage of my training, I was up to 10 hours per week and managing to remain injury-free.

June was a very busy month for me with three triathlons – TriAthy (Kildare), Crooked Lake (Armagh), Blackwater (Cork) – and another Howth aquathlon. It always seems to take me a few races to get warmed up

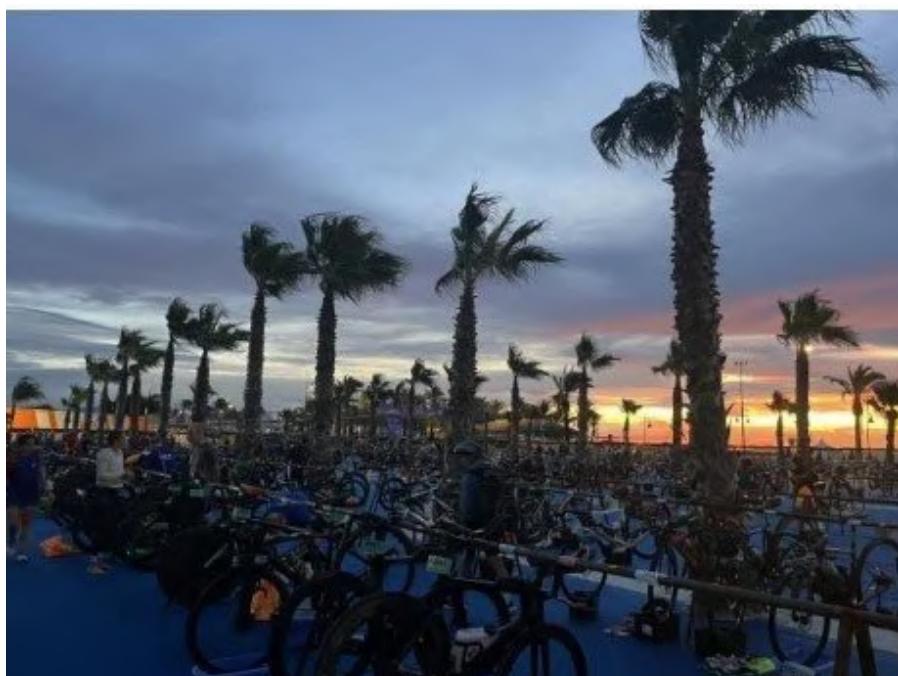
for the season and this was certainly true as I made some mistakes early on e.g. at the Blackwater tri, I messed up my nutrition and completely bonked on the run. But you live and learn!

In July, I was on my family holiday in Croatia and, to try and maintain my fitness, I did lots of early morning runs in the heat! However, my clever plan backfired when I became run down and got shingles so when I returned to Dublin, my training took a hit for a few weeks.

August and September were hectic and my hours were hovering around 10-12 per week but things started to come together with a 1st in my AG at Skerries and 4th at DCT. With my big race rapidly approaching, and to keep my momentum going, I asked coach Danny to give me some 1:1 instruction. Even with only a few weeks to work with, he got me using power on the bike and running better than I had in years. This was proven with a sub-50 minute 10k at the Carlingford tri in September – my fastest in many years! This resulted in another 4th in my AG. Danny also convinced me to convert to mounting my bike with the pedals on so my neighbours now think I am completely mad as they watched me practising on the road in front of my house. It's not pretty but I'm actually doing it now! My last race of the National Series was the Pikeman tri in Rosslare. The weather was shocking on the day with lashing rain and strong winds. The swim was surprisingly unaffected by the conditions and a group of us from the same pool lane in Belvedere exited the water together. After emptying a litre of rainwater from my helmet, the cycle was simply a matter of gritting my teeth and the run was just pure survival! It paid off in the end with 1st in my AG which, on that day, meant I was National Champ too!

## **The Race**

I flew into Malaga on October 17th, two days before my race, collected my bike and registered. I also did a quick recce bike and run. On the day before the race, high winds meant the practice swim was cancelled so I just did a quick dip in the sea myself and got a feel for the water. I was also able to watch some of the other races for pros, para-athletes and age-groupers. The whole event is very inspiring as a spectator, when you see athletes competing with prosthetic limbs, juniors running a sub-30 minute 10k and athletes in their 80s flying along on their TT bikes!



## The sun rising over transition

On race morning, after an early breakfast, I headed down to the huge transition to set up in the dark. A german athlete was not happy that our two bike numbers were exactly opposite each other (not staggered as they should have been) on the rack. I suggested we could just squish up a bit but he got very agitated and demanded to see a technical official to sort it out. The official had no solution and told us to make do, which we did after the guy eventually calmed down. I had pre-chilled my drinks for the bike to try to avoid dehydration in the heat – one with dissolved gels and one with electrolyte. Last minute checks went well with no hitches



*Before the swim*



*Waiting to start the swim*

We had to be in our pen 30 minutes before the start time of 10:13am for my age group. It was a beach start where approximately 80 of us waited in a line while they played the sound of a thumping heart which is very nerve-wracking. Then the foghorn sounded and we all ran in to the water and the race began.

The swim was lovely – with clear water and no chop. I had studied the course beforehand and sighting off the buoys was fine. Happy with my speed and with very few thumps, I even overtook some of the previous wave which was great! Approaching the shore, I got a cramp in my calf but I managed to swim through it. The run from the swim exit to the bike (250m) was over a bridge and into the huge transition. Thankfully, I found my bike easily and ran to the mount line (another 350m) where loads of people were watching as I got onto my bike and into my shoes without embarrassing myself – phew!

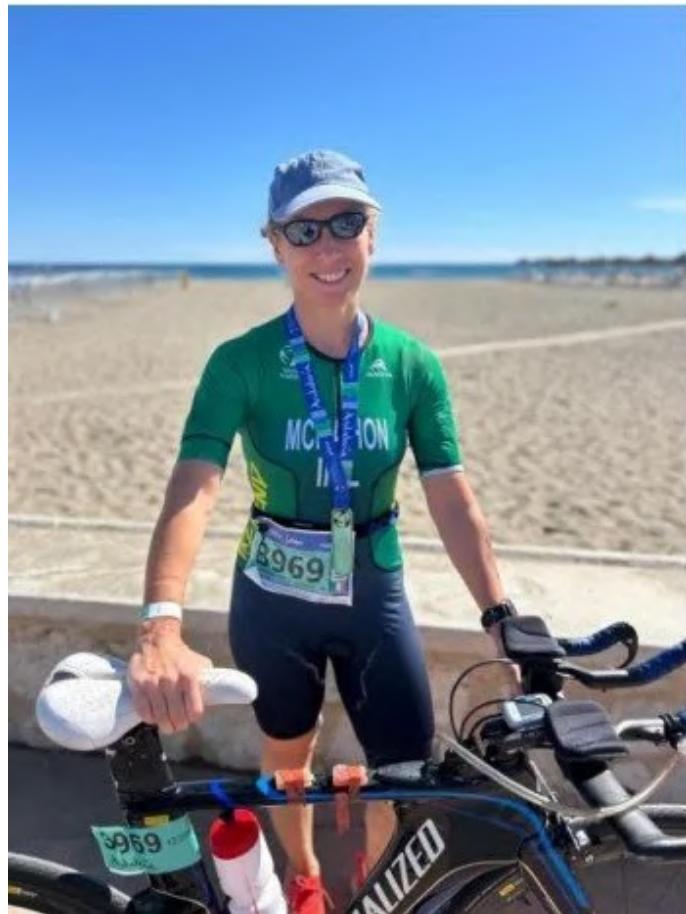
The bike course involved three loops. The almost 14k loop began with a number of technical turns to get out of Torremolinos, a 180° turnabout, a drag on a stretch of dual carriageway and a steep decline into Benalmadina where there was another 180° turn. In terms of drama, I saw everything from a cyclist who completely missed a roundabout and ploughed into a hoarding to an athlete riding with a rucksack of

supplies on her back! I tried to maintain solid power throughout and the time flew by. My dismount into T2 went smoothly – again, thank goodness, as there were hundreds of spectators!

The day had really heated up making the run tough so I stopped at a few aid stations to throw cold water over my head. I also helped an athlete who fell and I started to feel quite ill for the last 2km so my sub-50 was looking less and less likely. However, the enthusiastic Irish fans (and my ever-supportive husband!) waving flags and shouting made me keep going even when I was hurting and thought that the end would never come! My run ended up being 50:30 which I was delighted with under the circumstances. I crossed the finish line in 2:47, and I will never forget the feeling....I hadn't gone off course in the swim, I didn't cause a pile-up on the bike, I didn't fall flat on my face at dismount and I didn't give up on the run! I came 30th on the day (and Vanessa came 3rd!). If you have ever wondered where a lot of the pros go after they leave that circuit, it's the Worlds – so the standard is very high!

## **Final Reflections**

I thoroughly enjoyed my journey to the Worlds but it was only possible because of the great tri club we have in 3D! We all know that triathlon is an individual sport but training is so much easier when you have club mates to swim, cycle and run with. There is absolutely no way that I would do interval sessions in the dark, rain and wind on my own but somehow, you are motivated to turn up when the gang is there and there is always a bit of a chat and a laugh to get you through! We are also so lucky with our coaches – always encouraging us and ready with advice if needed. I chuckle when I think of Danny telling me that I was great on the Grangegorman loop when I've clearly been lapped and am barely trudging by! And thanks to Sean for all the swimming help given in Belvedere's heated pool! The support we get from each other during races is also so cool – from Stephen's lucky orange hat to the high fives as we pass each other on the course. I was so chuffed to be able to go to the Worlds and proudly wear the Irish trisuit but being able to compete was down to almost a year of preparation and training which I could not have done alone. I hope more 3D members get to go to the European or World Championships in the future as it is such an amazing journey and experience!



VERY HAPPY AFTER THE RACE!

