

Cathal McMahon - Hell of the West 2024 Race Report

October 28, 2024

Event: Hell Of The West, Kilkee, Co Clare. June 29, 2024.

Hell of the West is the reason I joined 3D Tri club.

2023, fuelled by hubris and sibling rivalry, I signed up for the Olympic distance triathlon on the west coast of Clare. My older brother, who lives in the US, suggested it would be an adventure and opportunity to bond. Secretly, I suspected he wanted a chance to beat his younger sibling, but I was game for the challenge. The event typically takes place in the last weekend in June in Kilkee, County Clare - the home of the current All Ireland champions and objectively the greatest county in Ireland!

As it turned out, the weather stateside in 2023 delayed my brother's flight, ultimately causing him to miss the race. And, It just got worse from there. A stormy swim where I nearly drowned was followed by a cycle out, and back, against the wind. By the time I was lacing up to take on the challenging run, I was fit to pack up and go home. I did end up finishing the race (barely!) but vowed I would never enter a triathlon so ill-prepared again. That night I googled triathlon clubs in north Dublin... and the rest is history

2024

So here I was again, back in Kilkee for the 2024 edition of this infamous race. Only this time I had a year of 3D training behind me. The brother, remember that fella?, wasn't able to join this year either but "kindly" transferred his deferred pass to me. Usually, one feels more relaxed when approaching a race for the second time, but that was most definitely not the case for me. The stomach felt like I'd just completed 100 flip turns and my face, I'm told, was whiter than the sheep dotted around the beautiful west Clare hills. It was wet, very wet, and a strange north to north-westerly breeze was starting to blow.

Swim

The swim began with a mass start, which typically adds a layer of chaos. However, following Coach Danny Roe's advice to position myself strategically allowed for a smoother experience. This year's conditions were a stark contrast to 2023; the calm sea facilitated a solid swim. I emerged from the water on target, a testament to the hard work on Tuesday nights with Danny and Sean leading up to the event.

Cycle

The bike course is around 45km (slightly longer than the normal Olympic distance) and it takes you from Kilkee toward Carrigaholt and then further on in the direction of Loop Head. The course is undulating and challenging, but there are no massive climbs. By the time I was clicking in, the rain and wind was picking up and conditions seemed to be worsening by the minute. Prevailing south-westerly winds mean that the first half of the course is traditionally challenging, but athletes should have tailwinds to bring them home. But, as mentioned earlier, there was an odd north-easterly on the day which flipped the script completely. By the

time I was turning for home, I was puffing and couldn't quite get into a decent rhythm against the challenging wind and rain. My time was below what I would have hoped for, but I had stopped thinking about it - survival and finishing were the primary motivators.



Run

Coming back into T2, everything was soaked. There was no time for a hairdryer, suck it up and drive on! The run course, known as the Dunlicky Road 10K, is a spectacularly scenic out and back overlooking the cliff faces of Kilkee. It's also an absolute beast, with close to 100m ascent, the vast majority in the first 1.5 kilometers.

The run is traditionally my strongest leg, and I started out strong, making sure to get some further fuel in. Many of those who sailed past me on their bikes/spaceships were now struggling on the hills, and I was feeling more relaxed. By 5km I was starting to hurt but knew the return leg was mostly downhill. However, west of Ireland had one final cruel trick up its sleeve. The wind was now blowing a gale, and I was running right into it. My pace dropped off, and I found myself once again in lizard brain survival mode. It felt like I was running against someone holding a wet mattress, and small inclines became mountains. Tapping into a year of excellent 3D coaching, I managed to maintain a respectable, if underwhelming, pace. Coming back into Kilkee, I didn't have much of kick to give, but the Banner roar was loud enough to carry me across the line. I was around two minutes outside my target time for the run. It was definitely a triathlon where the tank was emptied... I just probably need a bigger engine!

Final Thoughts

The grub was fantastic afterward, and there was a mountain of it. The organisers also provided a high-quality and spacious branded waterproof bag. There is no medal or t-shirt which can irk some, but I wasn't too pushed. The race is well organised by Limerick Triathlon club, and they were accommodating with the transfer. I would definitely recommend it for any club member who has a few triathlons under their race belts. 3D members should expect the unexpected and not come into it looking to secure a PB, unless that means Pretty Bollixed!


