



IRONMAN CASCAIS 2025 - RACE REPORT - LOUIS JOHANET

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SIGN-UP

I got peer pressured into signing up for my first full distance a year in advance as other fellow club members were already discussing entering the race. Having already completed the infamous 2023 70.3 race in Youghal and run the Dublin marathon twice, I felt ready to take on a longer format. I also knew that 2025 would be a relatively open year for me personally, which meant I could dedicate a significant amount of time to training.



Order Confirmation from IRONMAN

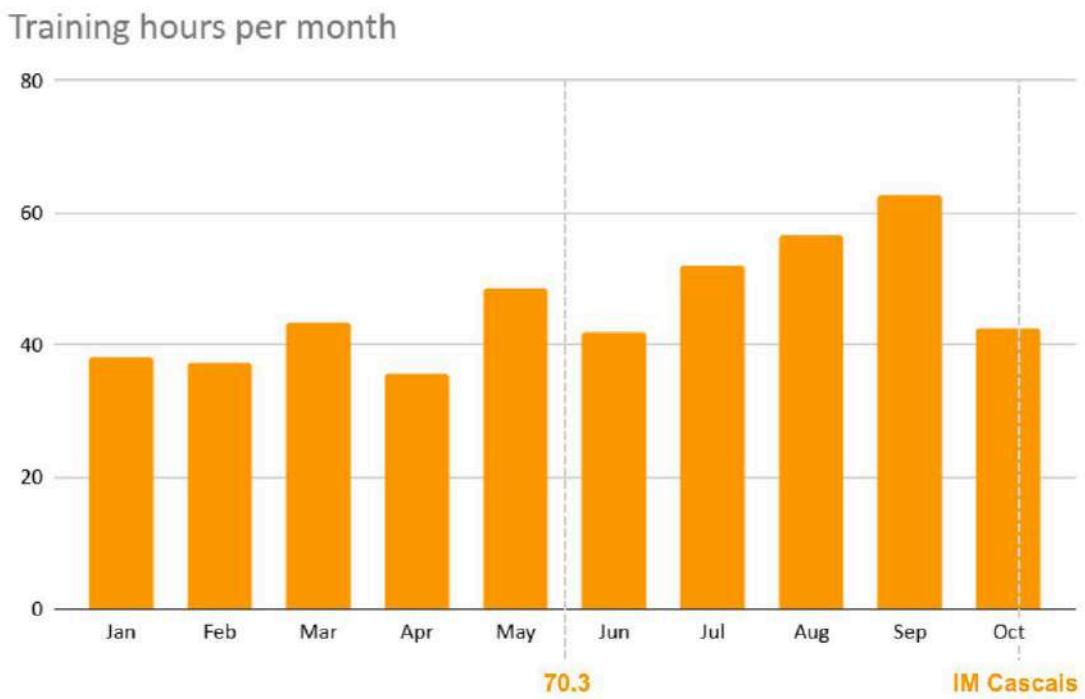
Congratulations, you are now registered for 2025 IRONMAN Portugal Cascais - we are excited to have you racing with us and are here to help you along the way. Make the most of your IRONMAN journey by completing the below checklist.

TRAINING

While the full distance would be my A race for the year, I decided to enter shorter race formats (sprint, olympics) early enough in the year, with a 70.3 early enough in the year so I would be forced to increase the volume months in advance.

I decided not to follow a specific program in terms of session content, but to broadly follow the [Super Simple Ironman training plan](#) in terms of volume. Since my goal was to simply finish the race, I also did not feel the need to hire a coach.

I gradually increased the training volume over the year, as recommended in the program above.

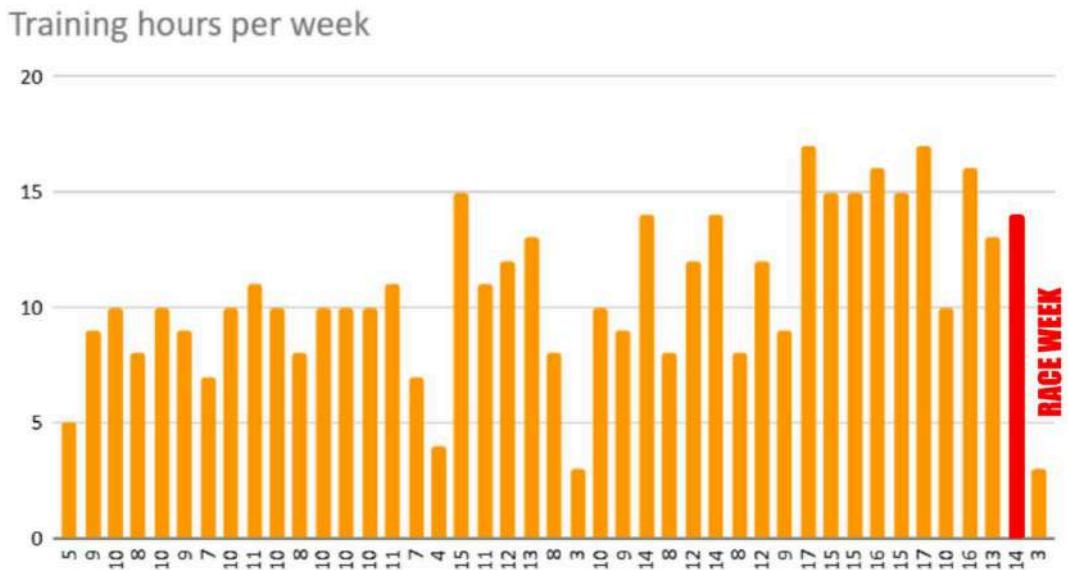


My plan was to build a good fitness base early in the year, averaging 6-10 hours of training per week, then increasing the volume 3 months leading up to the race with early morning sessions and longer week-end rides and runs.

An average peak week in the two months leading up to the race looked like the following:

- Monday: intervals swim in the morning, intervals run in the evening
- Tuesday: bike intervals on the home trainer, using random Rouvy sessions
- Wednesday: easy morning run, and evening gym session including core strength training (lower back, hips, and abs for better cycle posture)
- Thursday: easy morning run, bike intervals on the home trainer with Rouvy
- Friday: easy lunch run
- Saturday: long cycle
- Sunday: long run

I favored multiple easy short sessions rather than longer sessions or intervals because these fit my schedule better.



My peak week was supposed to include a 160km cycle and 30km run - life got in the way and I only did a 150km cycle, while my 30km was squeezed in later than I had wished. I still managed to get in a few weeks at 15h+ of training.

Overall I am very happy with how training went:

- Long cycles were not so boring when visiting places, e.g. cycle weekend in Connemara or cycling back from Dundalk.
- No injuries bar from a slight ankle discomfort after a long run involving wet grass
- Comfort issues were solved thanks to a lot of vaseline (chafing in bib shorts) and strength training (lower back pain when cycling, hip stability when running)
- I caught a bad cold 3 weeks before the race, so was less anxious about getting sick right before the race

I however wish I would have done a few things differently:

- Spending more time on the home trainer with over-under drills, to increase power
- Figuring out nutrition earlier to avoid bonking on the bike during training

LOGISTICS

Once I had signed up for the race, I booked a villa near the transition area in Cascais to secure accommodation for myself, as well as for any friends, family, or club members who might want to join. I later discovered that this wasn't strictly necessary if you only needed a small space (a room or a small flat) since prices remained very reasonable even just two weeks before the event.

Together with other club members, I used a professional service to transport my bike to Cascais and avoid airport hassle. Unfortunately, the first company we contacted disappeared with our money, so we had to rebook with a more reputable provider, Teamtruck, an official Ironman partner. The service itself was excellent, though their communication regarding the drop-off and pick-up times and locations was not the best to say the least.



ARRIVING IN CASCAIS

We arrived in Cascais on Wednesday for the Saturday race, giving us plenty of time to settle in and do some last-minute shopping at the local Decathlon, picking up gels, CO₂ cartridges, and even a new Garmin watch that would last long enough to get through the race.

On Thursday, we collected our bikes from Teamtruck and completed check-in to pick up our bibs and transition bags. The bibs are printed on-site, so it is a good idea to register at the same time as your friends or clubmates if you want adjacent numbers and to be placed together in the transition area.



After some wishful browsing for Ironman-branded tees and mugs in the athlete village, we headed out for a swim in the bay. It was the perfect chance to test our wetsuits and goggles one last time and practice sighting the buoys that were already in place. That 3.8-km loop looked impressively daunting!

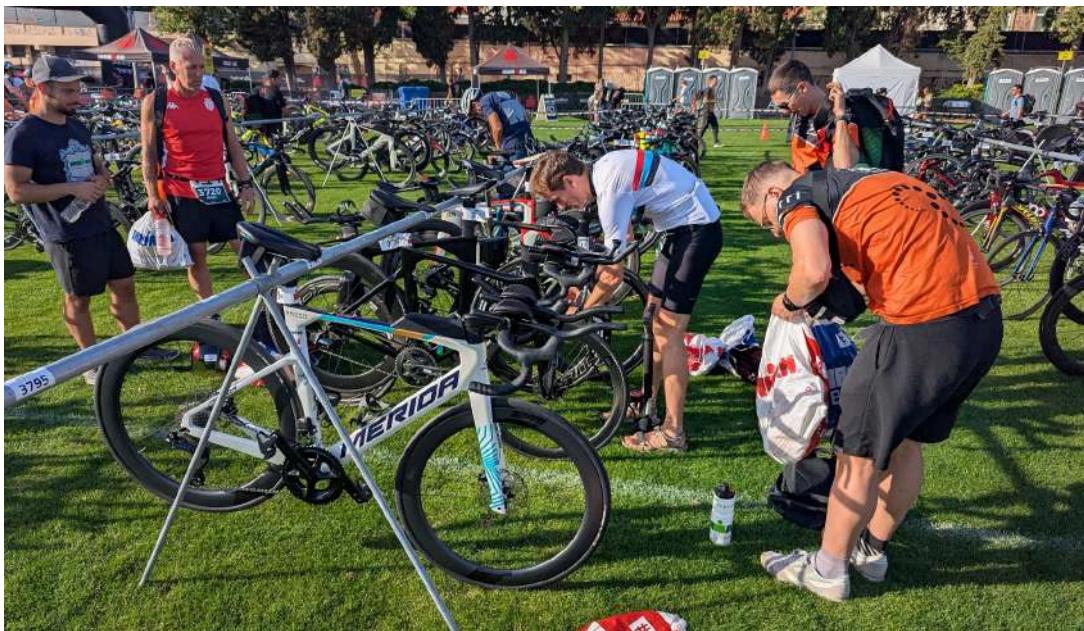


On Friday, most of us went for a short ride to make sure our bikes and gears were in good working order. There are plenty of bike mechanics available in the athlete village, who can fix most mechanical issues for around €30 on a first-come, first-served basis.

We then went home to prepare transition bags that needed to be dropped later in the day. This took way longer than anticipated, especially with the stress building up and the fear of forgetting something crucial.



We then dropped off our bikes and transition bags in the transition area, removing bike bottles and GPS to only add them the next morning. Someone also recommended deflating the tires to avoid spontaneous bursts due to overheating, but I doubt this can happen in Portugal outside of a heatwave.



Over the past 3 days, we ended up walking back and forth the AirBnB quite a lot. Although it was just 25 mins away from transition, we felt very tired at the end of the day, so in hindsight I would recommend staying in the closest accommodation you can find.

For lunch and dinner, we stuck to chicken and pasta, keeping fiber intake low while loading up on carbohydrates for the next day, and discussed the race strategy and nutrition details. This was the moment I realized I was really improvising on the nutrition front and would probably need to consume far more than I had during training.

RACE DAY

We woke up at 5.30am for a 8.40am race start, mostly because we needed to drop the special needs bags before 7.20am. These bags come in very handy if you need anything specific midway through the cycle or the run.

We then prepared our bike bottles, filling these with carbs and electrolytes for the ride, and regular water bottles with electrolytes to sip before the swim and after. Remember not to bring bike bottles you care about, as you will likely be discarding them at aid stations to pick up pre-filled ones.



Breakfast was the usual for me: eggs, bread, and coffee, with fingers crossed for a cooperative morning digestive system.

We entered transition for a final bike check and added a bit more nutrition to the T1 and T2 bags. My special needs bag for the bike contained Vaseline (in case of chafing) and two pizza

slices. These ended up soaked because I had not closed a bottle properly. We placed water bottles and GPS back on the bike and dropped off the special needs bags. Make sure not to put anything valuable in these bags, as you will not get them back after the race!

Next, we headed down to the beach, changed into our wetsuits, applied anti-chafing cream, dropped off our streetwear bags, and lined up for the start in the 1:10 swim section at sunrise while the 70.3 participants were already swimming away.



Note that if you were planning on taking a last minute poop, all portaloos were out of toilet paper and there was no soap or hand sanitizer in sight.

THE SWIM

With the rolling start, I quickly realized I had not warmed up at all due to the excitement so my shoulders felt stiff. The water temperature was 17.5°C, and while it was a bit of a washing machine around the buoys, sighting was straightforward. I would say sighting was probably harder for the 70.3 as they had the rising sun in their face heading out the bay! The swim was a single 3.8km loop in the sheltered bay of Cascais.

I managed to keep a straight enough line while avoiding big groups to not get hit in the face.

After about 20 minutes, I started feeling really cold, which surprisingly caused sharp groin pain I had never experienced before. It was manageable but made me a little anxious about hypothermia. I also experienced calf cramps, thankfully only in the last 200 meters. I kicked hard to get the blood flowing and finally exited the water after 1:13, running down to transition with shaking, shivering legs.



THE BIKE

I spent a considerable amount of time in T1 trying to warm up again, taking a leak, drying off, eating a banana with electrolyte water, and applying sunscreen. I had decided to use bib shorts for the cycle instead of a trisuit for the whole race, and lingered a bit too long in the very warm changing tent to put these on. Between shaking off the cold and changing, I ended up spending about 20 minutes in T1 but was still stoked about the swim.

I headed out for the bike, which consisted of two 90km loops with the first 20 km of each loop being very hilly. My right calf felt very tight, and I was not feeling very powerful, so I proceeded cautiously, monitoring my heart rate to remain under 140 since I did not have a power meter. The first climb in Sintra was tough, and I dreaded repeating it on the second lap especially with a sore calf.

Remembering the nutrition discussions from the night before, I forced myself to eat solid food every 30 minutes (fruit paste and breakfast energy bars) and frequently grabbed delicious Maurten oat bars at aid stations. The route flattened as I headed toward Lisbon, but I still was not feeling great, and my calf was approaching cramp territory. I decided to chug the rest of my own carb bottles, discard them at the next aid station, and replace them with a single electrolytes-only bottle to sip between stations. This was a risky strategy recommended by a club member: I would save some weight, but if I dropped my only bottle or missed a station, I would be in trouble.

I spotted a few photographers along the way and kept note of their locations so I could put on a race face on the second lap. The laps on the F1 Estoril circuit are particularly cool, although not as flat as expected!



After the turnaround point and heading back to Cascais, the single electrolyte bottle strategy seemed to work and my calf felt better. However I started feeling the same usual chafing I frequently got in training. Thankfully, with the 90 km mark came the special needs bag. I stopped for a volunteer to hand me my bag, applied a generous layer of Vaseline on my butt and started cycling again while eating my wet pizza slices. Unfortunately the paper bag they were in ripped and I could only eat a small piece, but it still felt heavenly. I was definitely glad I put some real, fatty and salty food in this bag!

The second lap felt much better, likely thanks to the increased electrolytes intake. I attacked the Sintra climbs harder this time, passing several riders on TT bikes. Along the way, I saw some athletes receive penalties for various reasons, like peeing roadside or crossing the center line, and a few crashes near aid stations as riders tried to grab bottles on the fly.

On the flat section toward Lisbon, the wind was at my back, and I was now feeling powerful. I managed to stay on the aerobars for longer periods and averaged 34 km/h, which I rarely do. The joy did not last, though, as the return leg brought a headwind with about 30 km left to Cascais. Out of carb drinks and sweet bars, I took a gamble by only eating solid Maurten bars instead of gels, which I wanted to reserve for the run. I knew these were heavier on the stomach, but I trusted I would have time to digest.

Note that if you want to keep souvenir IM-branded bike bottles from aid stations, make sure you do so before the last station as they only hand water bottles there, likely to prevent you from keeping bottles!



Arriving back in Cascais, I was still feeling good, and the calf tightness had vanished. I finished the 180 km bike in 6:43, with a significantly faster second lap.

THE RUN

T2 went better than T1, with less than 10 minutes spent there, including taking a second leak. I still took the time to triple-check that I had everything, namely four different gels to combat flavor fatigue, cap, and glasses, and apply more sunscreen before heading out for the run. The run consisted of three laps of about 13km, heading out of Cascais town along a very scenic coastal road.

The Maurten bars from the bike did not weigh on my stomach, and I ran the first 13 km without taking any gels, just sipping electrolytes and coke at the very frequent aid stations. With the sun still up and the temperature quite warm, I splashed myself with water at every station without stopping.

I took my second gel around 20 km, still feeling good, but keeping a conservative pace of 5:30min/km to ensure leaving some gas in the tank and avoid walking the end of the marathon. The route was very pretty, especially when the sun started to set. While there was not a big crowd outside of Cascais town, frequently spotting other 3D club members along the route helped with the morale. At 25 km, I unleashed my secret weapon: a large “double espresso gel” with double caffeine and sugar, timed to kick in right before the marathon wall.

The support was great around Cascais harbor, especially with my partner, club mates and friends cheering from the sidelines. At some point, I even heard Marine Leleu, a famous French triathlon influencer, calling my name. I was quite surprised to see her there and got an extra boost of energy from it!



Fast forward 45 minutes, and I was feeling fantastic: no fatigue, no pains whatsoever, and with the sun gone down, it was pleasantly cooler. I realized I could possibly beat my marathon personal best, so I pushed the pace to 5:00min/km, promising myself I would slow down at the first sign of cramping or elevated heart rate. I stuck to the same strategy of sipping electrolytes at every station, splashing myself with water and drinking coke, always without walking or stopping. I did however avoid the showers as I did not want to soak my runners and cause blisters.

Around 37 km, I took one last Maurten gel, still feeling strong, and decided to give it all for the finish. I could hear multiple “You are an Ironman” in the distance, got excited and sprinted the final kilometer, forgetting to ring the bell in the process, and crossed the finish line to claim my medal, completing a 3:45 marathon personal best. Turns out someone rang the bell so hard they broke it, so the announcer was now calling all names!



I finished the race in 12:11:41, far exceeding my original goal, thanks to a faster-than-expected marathon. Had I not spent so much time in T1, I could have aimed for a sub-12-hour finish. Looks like I will have to go back and chase this milestone!

POST RACE

In the recovery zone, there were plenty of complimentary food options such as poké bowls, pizzas, burgers or soups. After engraving my medal with my personal times, I retrieved my streetwear bag, collected my bike and transition bags, and headed home. I had no gas left in the tank to eat outside, but I was surprisingly feeling decent.

The next few days also went well, I was even able to go down stairs without excessive soreness, unlike after my first two marathons. Perhaps it was thanks to all the cross-training involved in

triathlon, but either way, I was glad to still be mobile and able to fully enjoy my week of vacation in Portugal!

CONCLUSION

While I put in the training in terms of volume, I lacked preparation on nutrition and minor comfort issues like chafing. Thankfully these did not hinder my experience, and I was able to enjoy and finish the race, which was my main goal. Finishing under 13 hours was the cherry on top.

The whole route was very scenic, the atmosphere in Cascais was buzzing and I could not find any organizational issue except for the portaloos lacking TP and hand sanitizer. This race is the largest Ironman in Europe, and I would definitely recommend it for anyone willing to do a first full distance as it simply has it all.

