



Ultraman Canada 2011 – July 30-Aug 1
A 3-day 514.9K/320.2Mile Ultra Journey

By Katherine Calder-Becker & Kevin Becker

For several years now, we wanted to take on the challenge of Ultraman Canada. Why? Why not! "Live your WHOLE Life". For those of you not familiar with the race or the distances, it's an Individual Ultra Endurance Triathlon held in Penticton BC at the beginning of August. The event is held over three days and consists of a 10K swim, 420.6K bike and 84.3K run, with a 12-hour time limit each day. Ultraman is by 'invitation only' and is open to a select few individuals each year. Athletes who successfully complete Ultraman Canada can then apply to race at the Ultraman World Championships in Hawaii.

About the Race

Day 1 starts with a 10K point-to-point open-water swim from the beach in Skaha Lake to an exit point near OK Falls. For those of you familiar with Ironman Canada, we basically 'swim' alongside part of the run course. This is followed by 144.8K of cycling on the Ironman bike course, up and over Richter Pass and Yellow Lake with the ride ending at the beach in OK Falls.

Day 2 is a 275.8K bike ride starting at the Skaha Lake Marina and heading down through Oliver and Osoyoos, then back up into OK Falls where the course then goes up 'The Wall' and through a section of rolling hills up to White Lake, a descent through Yellow Lake to Keremeos, then up through Headley, into Princeton and up to Alison Lake to a turn-around point, with the finish of the stage back in Princeton.

Day 3 is an 84.3K run, which begins just outside of Princeton on an old fire-road and snakes up and over a rolling mountain range with some steep and unforgiving climbs, then heads downhill into Summerland to the finish line.

The unique part about Ultraman is that a minimum crew of two people is required to support each athlete for the duration of the race, which is key in providing nutrition and safety on the course. With only a select few athletes competing in this event, and vast distances to cover each day, crews can also support other athletes that they encounter on the course, making this a unique bonding experience for athletes and crewmembers alike.

The Journey Begins...

In 2005 someone asked Kat if she wanted to go to 'Kona' to race the Ironman someday... her reply was: "Kona – YES, but not for the Ironman World Championships, I want to do the Ultraman World Championships!!"... A simple thought sets a plan in motion!

We knew it would take time and patience for us to grow as endurance athletes, so we put a lot of training and racing miles in over the next few years, trying to gain knowledge and experience in several triathlon and Ironman races. We raced two Ironman's in both 2007 & 2008 and in 2009, were ready to take the endurance test up another notch, and raced three Ironman's in 4 months – Lake Placid, Ottawa & Cozumel. This was a good measure of our ability to train, race and recover, so we continued forward. In 2010, we were considering submitting our applications for consideration in Ultraman Canada (UMC) 2011 so decided to take on 3 Ironman's in three months, this time – Brazil, France & Canada. These races were close together on the calendar, but far apart on the map, so we learned to perform under pressure in varying race conditions, and in different time zones and geographic locations. By finishing Ironman Canada in 2010, we

felt things had come full circle for us, since this was where we raced our first Ironman in 2006 – it was the right time to make the commitment! While we were in Penticton, we met with UMC race director Steve Brown a couple of times to discuss our 2011 plans and go over the course in greater detail. We had studied the maps and read through the athlete's guide, but wanted to be sure we were ready. Steve was great at reassuring us we were the right fit for this type of race, and felt we both had the mindset going into it that would help us see it through to completion. His exact words were "go home and start training"!... YOWZA! ULTRAMAN – now that was really taking things up a notch! Could this dream actually become reality? A successful race at Ultraman Canada would certainly be a step towards Hawaii...

The Crews

Once we had 'signed' on the dotted line and made the race commitment, it was time to choose our crews. This came very easy for us because we each selected two people who have been key motivators and sources of inspiration to us throughout our lives.

Kevin chose his cousin Kenny and our daughter Cassandre, and Kat chose her sister Anne and our coach Matt Sauve from Peak Performance in Montreal. We knew that these 4 people always had our 'backs', and could perform under pressure. We also knew they could handle anything that might come at them during the race – from an ice shortage on course, a flat tire, mental meltdown and everything in-between! Thankfully they all accepted the challenge and we were underway!

The training begins...

The Ultraman is a very different beast from an Ironman, and you can't hide from the distances. You need to be committed to put the time into proper training and be meticulous in testing your gear and nutrition. Last minute strategies generally will lead to an unhappy athlete and crew, so planning long in advance and communicating these details to our crews was an integral part of race preparation. We had the time. We were committed, or perhaps should be committed!

Nutrition was a key component to the plan as well, so we consulted with Darcy Haggith at Infnit Canada to better understand race nutrition and determine our individual sweat-rates and caloric requirements. We measured and carefully recorded the data and tested with the 'stock' Infnit Run & Ride Triathlon formulas to get a baseline. Once this was established, we came up with our own 'custom' formulas. We knew that if our nutrition went wrong on any given day during the race, we'd be done, so figuring out our requirements before the event and laying out a plan for our crews to follow would be a key part of our race success.

Our weekends were consumed by training, and we found ways to get creative with our time during the week by doing long commutes to work and evening runs at night. Saturday mornings were reserved for long distance swims, starting with 5 & 7.5K sessions, then working our way up to 8 & 10K's. During this time, we were testing our nutrition on the bike and run and made a point to test it in the swim as well. Inspired by 2010 UMC finisher and cyber-buddy Sheila Plemich, we did a series of 'Nothingman's' - this was basically a motivational way to tackle big blocks of training over the long winter months with no prize or reward other than completing the given workout. This mindset helped us follow the detailed training plan and crazy workouts laid out by coach Matt and allowed us to put countless hours into the 'Ultra training bank'. Fortunately we had lots of laughs along the way and learned a lot about ourselves in the process – by mid-July, we were ready!

The Race

We were excited and nervous when we arrived in Penticton, a little under a year after that fateful meeting in Steve Brown's office, ready to toe the start line with 29 other carefully selected athletes. We landed a few days before our crews in order to setup the house and take care of food shopping and pre-race formalities.

When the crews arrived, we went right into the pre-race meetings, strategy planning and course rules and logistics. It was great to meet all the athletes and crews and spend some time with our

paddlers in the two days leading up to the race start – a great way to absorb what was about to take place.



We studied the maps to determine where we wanted our planned 'feed' stops, avoiding the 'no-feed zones' and downhill sections of the course. The strategy for the crews was to work in a leap-frog technique to make the planned 'hand-off', then wait while we would ride up ahead. When they projected that we would be near the next 'feed-zone', they would re-appear ready to supply us with our nutrition, and anything else we happened to need.

Throughout the meetings, we had the pleasure of getting to know Steve Brown, his wife Maria and daughter Alexis along with his excellent crew of volunteers and officials who shape the spirit of this world-class event. They included the course marshals, bike mechanics, medical team, massage team and registration, food and sponsorship coordinators. If that wasn't enough, Steve had arranged an all-star lineup to travel along with us throughout the event.



We had Space Shuttle Discovery Astronaut Colonel Alvin Drew on hand as a guest speaker providing inspiration and motivation, legendary athlete and race announcer Steve King (the voice of Ironman) who would be doing commentary and announcing, athlete and photographer extraordinaire Rick Kent who was set to capture our moments in history, and Jane Bockus, race director for the Ultraman World Championships in Hawaii who was our official timer! HOW COOL IS THAT!! Once all the details were mapped out, it was time to race!

Day 1 : 6:45AM – 10K/6.2mile Swim + 144.8K/90.3mile Bike – We were up at 4am for breakfast, vans loaded, and off to Skaha Lake by 5:15AM for the swim start. Our crew Captains checked us in, and the daily medical ritual was performed: weight, BP, HR, body temp and blood sugars were recorded.



After the official 'athlete' photos were taken by all-star photographer Rick Kent, Steve Brown recited the spiritual mantra of Ultraman – Ohana (family), Kokua (help) & Aloha (love) and it was time to get the race underway.



We headed into the water and lined up with our paddlers who would accompany us down the lake providing guidance and nutrition. Debra & Carmine Dantonio did an excellent job of steering us both straight down the lake and handing off our Infinit nutrition in 30-minute intervals. The water was around 20C and was calm and flat, which made for an excellent swim experience – everything felt great and scenery was beautiful – we were IN the ULTRAMAN!



Before we knew it, we could hear the voice of Steve King across the lake calling us to shore – the swim was almost complete – WOW, that went fast! Kat came out of the water in 3:16:54 – ahead of schedule and NO SIPE, thanks to her new DeSoto T1 wetsuit! YAHOO... Kev followed shortly after in 3:33:05 – YIPEE!



With the help of our crews, we both made quick transitions (we both wore our DeSoto Forza Tri-gear for day 1 and skipped changing) and were off on our bikes – Kev on his trusty Gianella TTA and Kat on her custom Gianella TTC. The bike course is essentially the same as the Ironman Canada course, with the exception of the finish, so it was familiar ground for us. Down through Oliver and Osoyoos, then up Richter Pass, into Keremeos then up and over Yellow Lake.



We were both following our nutrition plans and reloading our Infinit every 20-30mins, which worked great as we stayed hydrated and fuelled and kept a great electrolyte balance. It was fun to see the other crews out on the road as well in leap-frog mode as you never felt alone or far from someone you knew – with 'Ultraman' flags on the cars and signs warning 'Caution – Bikers / Runners' our presence on the road was known! By early afternoon the air temp had risen to about 33C and the sun was high, so we were feeling the heat. Kat quickly began utilizing UMC 2010 female champ Tracey McQuair's tip of 'ice bags' to stay cool. Kev forgot to read the memo and was overheating somewhat on the bike so was dousing himself with water to try to stay cool.



Before we knew it, we were descending back into OK Falls and had some serious crosswinds to contend with for the last 25K of the ride – nearing the finish, the voice of Steve King could be heard in the final few KM's, then at the last turn towards the finish line Alexis Brown was there to point the way! With her lead out of the swim, Kat managed to hold Kev off on the bike with a ride time of 5:16:17, for a combined total time of 8:33:11 for day 1, meanwhile Kev had made up some time on the bike with a 5:13:35 and ended the day with a combined total of 8:46:40. Yes, 'chicked' by Kat day 1 – doh!!!



After a quick medical exam and post-race massage, it was time to relax and cool off! We had purchased a small dingy at Canadian Tire before the race, thanks to the advice of UMC 2010 3rd place finisher Mike Coughlin. This would be our post-race treat for completion of each stage – an ice bath at the finish line, and a Stella Artois!

Day 2 : 6:00AM– 275.8K / 171.3mile Bike – After a good meal and a solid 6 hours of sleep, we were up at 4AM again, ready to head to the startline at the Skaha Lake Marina. We chose to wear our DeSoto Forza Tri tops & 400mile bike shorts for Day 2 and Kev opted to wear his DeSoto 'Cool Wing' arm coolers to prevent over-heating! Once our crew Captains checked us in, and medical was done, it was time to get started. Since day 1 was behind us, the pre-race nerves were long gone and it felt more like we were headed out for a long ride with a group of friends rather than day 2 of a stage race! Steve and the Ultraman family were ready to get us rolling and we had a nice pre-race pep talk by UMC 2010 winner Kevin Cutjar – what a great way to start the day! More pics and we were off...



Once in motion, it was easy to keep the rhythm going. Temps again were warm and sunny and the winds were fairly calm – the ride went very well with the first section being fairly flat and fast through Oliver and Osoyoos, but Kev managed to get a flat in this section so he lost a bit of time. Thanks to the help of two other crews (Fausto & Donato's), Kev was back on the road in no-time – ahhh, the spirit of Ultraman! Once through OK Falls, the course takes on a tough section called 'The Wall', where Steve King was perched at the top of the climb calling out to us again – sure is great have the encouragement and hear your stats on the way up! Rick Kent was up there as well along with his ever-smiling assistant Matt capturing all the pain and glory! The ride then climbs up through Green and White Lake's – a reminder that this course is not for the faint of heart.



The hill repeats on Mont Royal in training and computrainer sessions at Peak certainly paid off at this point in the race! The scenery was breathtaking and our crews were great at getting us our Infinit every 30-35 minutes without fail – Nutrition really is the 4th discipline and the plan had to be followed! We descended into Keremeos and the fun began – a 95K section of the course with brutal 40K+ headwinds – climbing up through Headley into Princeton. The wind was relentless and unforgiving as was the stream of traffic – campers, vans and trucks.



Mental toughness was detrimental through this section of the race – but all the crews were motivating each of us to keep it rolling and dig deep! Once we arrived in Princeton, the ride wasn't done yet and the wind and climbing continued up to Alison Lake. This is one of the most beautiful places we'd ever seen. Surrounded by mountains, trees and lakes that are just breathtaking, while at the same time, we were being tested mentally and physically to the breaking point. The reward was, once you hit the turn-around in Alison Lake, it was downhill with a tailwind to take you to the finish of stage 2 where Steve Brown and the UMC family were waiting!



Kat had another great day and rode a 10:29:34, with Kev close behind in 10:41:29. 'Chicked' again – YES – ahhh, but the race wasn't over... there's still a double marathon to run!



Again, medical check, post-race massage, a fresh ice-bath and daily beer were waiting at the finish line! With stage 2 complete, Steve had arranged for all of us to stay in Princeton for the night and enjoy a post-race meal together.



Day 3 : 6:00AM– 84.3K/52.4 mile Run – Surprisingly, we were able to sleep well again and awoke on Day 3 still feeling good – ready to roll! Breakfast was served at 5AM sharp for the athletes and crews which a great way to start the day, and soon after the convoy of vans set out for the 15K drive to the start line just outside of Princeton – literally, a 'crack' in the road.



We suited up with our LuLuLemon 'tried-and-tested' run gear, since it was soft on the skin and was by far the best run garments we had tested and trained with. Kev wore his Endorphin Run shorts and Metal Vent Tech shirt, Kat in her Swifty Racerback and Turbo Run shorts, topped with her Run Inspire crop to start out with, in the cold crisp 7degC morning air!. Once the 'check-in' and 'medicals' were complete, it was time to run! Veteran Rick Kent gave us a few last minute words of advice just before the start: 'enjoy the first third, and the last third will reward you' – great advice Rick! Then Col. Alvin Drew, along with Steve King, counted us down 3...2...1... GO! A quick kiss and we were off! At this point, the mental fatigue was like a dull weight and visual focus was required to zone-in on the road up ahead. In this type of event, you can't fixate on time or distance. You just need to take that first step and keep going until you reach the finish line.

The run course is like wrestling a bear. A big, heavy bear. The course starts off on pavement and is fairly flat for the first 10K, then goes over a series of rolling hills followed by a few downhill sections. By 8am temps were on the rise and most athletes had shed some of the extra layers of clothing along with hats and gloves. Kev hit the 21.1K mark within 2h15 and had moved up to 10th place.



Kat was in 'grind-it-out-mode' and came through in 21st place at 2h40. At around the 34K mark, the course changes from pavement to dirt and the rollers continue. The fun part of the run is that everything slows down quite a bit, so the exchange between athletes and crews is much more frequent. The support on course is always present and there's more time to enjoy the breathtaking scenery!



Kev's first marathon was done in 4h41 with several runners right on his tail – Steve King was perched out on course with his trusty PA, and as Kev flew by he remarked that he was “on track for a 9h double”!!! Kat came through the first marathon in 5h07 and was gaining positions, making solid progress! Feeling good at the 50K mark, Kev did some quick blister repair and decided to push the pace... Kat the energizer bunny continued to ‘churn-it-out’ – consistent and solid.



Both were downing the Infinit, right on track according to plan, with the odd bite of potato just to keep something solid in the gut. At around the 62KM mark, it was time to tackle ‘the beast’ and Kev chose to power-walk right up it, Kat kept her ever constant ‘churn’ going. The scenery was breathtaking – jaw dropping in fact! This was the steepest climb of the course and lasted for about 10KM's, then we began the “quad-smashing descents” as promised by UMH 2010 champ Mick LeRoux – thanks for the warning Mick! There are a few downhill sections at first, then things flatten out a bit so you think ‘it’s not so bad’... but it gets worse, much worse. The closer you get to Summerland, the steeper it gets – at one point, it’s a 9% downhill grade. On tired legs, the pounding seems to go on forever. Focus and turnover are key here. Kev continued on his charge feeling great, and remarked the wise words of Rick Hellard who had told him in 2007 when he had PB’d at IMFL – “these days are far and few between enjoy them” – he did Rick!



The run to the finish line was a moment of sheer joy, and celebration. We had traveled for 514.9KM's through the Okanagan Valley, and hand-in-hand were able to complete the Ultraman journey together with our crews.



Kev ran the second marathon 18 minutes faster than his first to 'negative split' the run to finish in a stellar 9:04:45, and Kat's constant rhythmic churn resulted in a 10:40:04!

The totals for our three day ultra-adventure were:

28:32:55 for Kev, 6th male - 8th overall

29:42:49 for Kat, 4th female - 15th overall



The Magic

There are many people who make this event special and unique. The event organizers, the athletes and crews all seem to form a special kind of bond over the 6 days spent together. From the pre-race meetings, the daily race itself, and the awards banquet, there is a transformation that takes place that is indescribable. Perhaps it's because the enormity of the event humbles us before we begin. It equalizes us and brings us to a primal place that strips away any ego or pretension. From this, we can enjoy an intensely rich experience that forces us to dig deep within our souls and grow through this process emerging in a state of utter joy and celebration for life and accomplishment when the journey is complete.



People had described to us how very different Ultraman is compared to doing an Ironman, and how the journey is one of Ohana (family), Kokua (help) and Aloha (love) – we learned that it's all of that, and much, much more. Veterans like Nick Mallett, toeing the start line with us each morning offering a daily 'nugget' of advice as we were about to set out. Past finishers such as Mick LeRoux, Tracey McQuair, Mike Coughlin and Sheila Plemich openly sharing their advice about the course, training tips, planning and preparation, and opinions on clothing, bike choice and nutrition – this is the true spirit of what Ultraman is about.

As well, both our crews were exceptional throughout the duration of the event. We asked a lot of them by requesting that they join us on the journey, and they stepped up to the plate and hit it out of the park. Without their continual support and help, we would not have been able to succeed in this event. They spend countless hours chasing us around the Okanagan Valley, running in and out of vans handing off dozens of bags of ice, bottles of Infnit and coming to our aid with Vaseline, toilet paper, Band-Aids and surprise treats when we needed them most. They also gave us the moral support to keep going. Seeing the crew van up ahead was the true meaning of Ohana, Kokua and Aloha. They were there for the ups and downs, and were very quick to react. From Ken with his great costumes and dance moves, Cass with her protective and meticulous administration of nutrition, Kev had the support he needed to make it to the finish line. Kat had the constant reminders of "I love you" from Anne each and every time the van rolled by, and the humor and encouragement of coach Matt with his multiple outfit changes and an impromptu 65K run on Day 3! Crossing the finish line was the completion of an epic journey for all of us – for that, we salute you and offer our deepest thanks!

Special mention goes out to :

Steve Brown – Calm, reassuring and direct – a wealth of information, always willing to share – forever waiting at the finish line with a big hug for each athlete as they crossed over to complete the days journey

Alexis Brown – For having her father's vision, and for her forward thinking ideas – loved the brightly coloured directional arrows that kept us on track!

Rick Kent – accomplished athlete and master photographer – hanging out of the pontoon boat, driving up beside you in a car, or teetering in some precarious location to get 'the shot' to capture your moment in history.

Jane Bockus – meticulously noting everyone's splits and final times, keeping an official record of history in the making – always smiling, a kind and gentle presence in this crazy chaotic event.

Steve King – from out of no-where comes the 'voice' of Ironman... out in the woods, or perched on a hilltop, Steve's got all your stats and is sharing them with the world over a PA system in the middle of nowhere – he's your number one fan in that moment and makes you feel like a rock-star!

In Conclusion

This event, and the spirit it embodies, has left us with the greatest joy and sense of accomplishment imaginable. It has changed us. The journey to get to the start line was epic in it's own right, and we had so much fun in the process, we could have just stopped it there... the transformation that took place in our hearts and minds over the duration of the event brought things to an entirely different level. We will be back. In addition to returning to Ultraman Canada in 2012, we will attempt to race the Ultraman World Championships in Hawaii, and hope to be adding the 'Double Ultraman' title to our list of accomplishments in the coming year.

Thanks to everyone who helped us along the way, including our great team of sponsors: DeSoto Triathlon Clothing, Gianella Bikes, Lululemon Athletica and Infnit Nutrition Canada.



We would also like to thank our employers Baldor Quebec Atlantique (Kev) and Godin Guitars (Kat), with a very special thanks to our parents – Henry, Anne, George & Kathy – for their unconditional love and support...

Check out our photo gallery, and follow our adventures at <http://www.endurancetriathletes.com/>