

TWO DAY COAST TO COAST – VINTAGE INDIVIDUAL BY JOHN WALKER

A novice in the vintage individual category of the 2 day Coast to Coast has a similar perspective going into and through the race to those in the 1 day as described by Phil although that is not to understate the world of difference with the preparation, commitment and performance of the one-dayers.

What is particularly common to all the 800 competitors over both days is the contribution of their support teams. The infectious enthusiasm, selfless spirit, patience and bond apparently triggers most competitors, as occurred also for me.

Some illustration of part of the diary of a support team (from my appreciation as a competitor) is:

- Start well before the race to get in good physical shape (otherwise prepare to feel like a slug among over-energised competitors and other supporters), practice sleep deprivation and prepare for sharp and intense intervals of stress and demands and spoiling competitor.
- If camping during race, on Thursday preceding Friday's start, travel to Kumara Racecourse and set up tents/campervan by which time the anxious competitor will be pretty much useless to assist.
- Attend pre-race banquet, hopefully arranged and paid for by competitor, at 1 of 2 sittings at Kumara Hall, along with about 2,000 other support members and 800 competitors (observe usual Kumara population is about 400).
- Listen to pre-race briefing from the legendary Robin Judkins (running 27th consecutive C2C).

Race Day One

- Self start about 4:30am unless already started by others. Don't bother to try and communicate with competitor who is between excitement at getting into racing gear and mainly needlessly in the light of a headlamp again checking gear and food.
- Pack up camp and have little difficulty with a surge of excitement and vitality at 5:45am as about 2,000 support crew members spontaneously bond as they all convoy off in opposite direction to competitor
- At first transition (bike to run) keep looking out for competitor and when competitor arrives, and hopefully matches up with you in the melee, have no problem being excited as there has been no accident or puncture and you put in concentrated about 3 or 4 minutes while competitor throws bike at you, you take off helmet and gloves, take off a layer of clothing, put on pack, sunblock, assist with changing into running shoes, provide instant food.
- Take well deserved relaxation.

- Very patiently wait to exit paddock park for about 1500 vehicles and enjoy congested but scenic drive through Otira Gorge and Arthurs Pass to Klondyke Corner.
- Repeat tenting skills, assisted somewhat by competitor being well away somewhere in the mountains.
- Enjoy company and activity at the camping site and also the tent village set up around the run finishing shute situated in an otherwise totally deserted outstanding natural landscape.
- After seeing off competitor some 9 hours earlier experience genuine relief and enthusiasm when spotted plodding down final section of riverbed, after many optimistic earlier mistaken identifications, and try not to sustain any injury while running alongside competitor down the shute to finish of day one.
- Don't neglect to provide competitor with special recovery food in the golden half hour and also all the power drinks etc that are on offer while you enjoy their beer.
- Don't offer to assist competitor with very private chafing but warn of dire consequences of use of portaloos hand disinfectant.
- Be surprisingly interested and even moved by competitor's description of what has occurred and been seen since leaving the Tasman Sea at the 7:00am start.
- Pamper competitor other than during 20 at a time massage session.
- Don't expect any contribution from competitor to wind-up of day who will be mainly falling asleep but still expect plenty of apprehension and stressing over preparation for two bike stages and kayak stage the following day.
- Enjoy very sociable although early night with about 2,000 other support team members, now quite familiar friends.
- Don't overlook pre- packing up, particularly kayak but not bike.

Day Two

- Get up at 4:00am and try, along with support teams in 1,500 plus other vehicles, not to disturb competitors who can sleep in until about 5:30am.
- Leave by 5:00am for cycle/kayak transition at Mount White Bridge. Be thankful all portaloos have not gone before you but will do before all competitors get up.
- Experience freezing conditions at kayak transition before fantastic sunrise.
- Line up kayak, after another very responsible check of compulsory gear, among about 500 other kayaks and try to remember position.
- After competitor finishes bike stage and runs off Mount White Bridge, and throws bike at you again have other support team member boulder hop with competitor and assist into kayak in meticulously arranged gear confidently knowing all drink and food, etc safely on board.

- After competitor manages to incorrectly reverse order of putting on gear keep everything calm and carry kayak to river while performing team psychologist's role of committing kayaker to the river for at least 6 hours and nutritionist's role of force feeding.
- After about 5 mins, which seems like 50 self congratulate your support team.
- Don't worry about competitor's over 6 hours of potential drowning, collisions with other kayaks, damage from going aground, rocks and bluffs, and no toilet facilities on board.
- Make certain you take the bike with you plus gear, helmet etc.
- Enjoy at least 90 minutes in gridlock over 1km of road up to highway.
- Experience another congested scenic drive on alpine highway.
- After mandatory stop at Springfield for pie and coffee, along with about 1,000 other support team members, start to panic a little about being at the kayak get-out at Waimakariri Gorge Bridge in time.
- Arrive still hours ahead of time. Don't stress too much about setting up bike – tyres not too tight as they will blow up in the heat but cover tyres, have food and drink available and bike gear, changeover pedals for road bike shoes.
- Don't avoid getting quite excited that competitor may finish kayak leg in time and start off on final leg to Sumner.
- Almost relax with other support teams at get-out as responsibilities nearly over.
- Experience excited anticipation when notice board records competitor having passed Woodstock, approx 1 hour from get-out.
- On competitor's arrival attempt to pull out dead-weight competitor without putting own back out and taking all skin off competitor's shins. Endeavour to get their legs moving sufficiently to get up the track to bike.
- Change competitor into cycle gear, forcing in food and liquid, again check enough further food and liquid for final biking stage.
- Go back for kayak, before carrying to vehicle reduce weight by tipping out water and in doing so forget it has also been a mobile portaloos for 6 hours.
- After breathless 15 minutes, drive to Sumner beach without too much hold up this time as your competitor has assisted by leaving the field well spaced out by this stage and many vehicles already having left although unselfishly you will miss an earlier finish of 2 person team you have also been support for.
- Have final stress, related to getting to Sumner Beach before individual competitor who has the advantage of memorable encouragement of Christchurch people on the way and Police stopping traffic at intersections.

- On getting close to Sumner Beach be encouraged that you will at least be there before the individual competitor because of the strength of the easterly. Consequently, feel no sympathy for their headwind.
- Share excitement as individual competitor reaches point of getting off bike and you run close by onto the beach and see competitor through the finish.
- More than share in the satisfaction and emotion of your competitors going 243 km from coast to coast. Feel as if you have gone coast to coast also due to all the effort and stress and contribution. Your competitors couldn't have done it without such amazing support.
- Don't forget bike. You are still picking up the pieces but tomorrow will be different.
- Don't expect a big night out, or in. You may be asleep first.