

The long and winding road

Chris Bennett reports from Fuerteventura on the latest training camp for the participants in the Oakley Activated by Transitions Ironman challenge

Strong venturer sums up the spirit among the Oakley Activated by Transitions Ironman Team. It seems fitting then that the second training camp should have been held in Fuerteventura whose name means precisely that. In late March the Oakley Transitions Ironman Team met for its second training camp this time to concentrate on the bike section of the event. The team will take part in the Ironman Monaco 70.3 this September. If successful, they will swim 1.9km in the sea, climb onto their bikes for a 90km cycle through the mountains before finally returning to the famous Monaco Grand Prix circuit to complete a half marathon.

Under the Spanish sun

The blazing sunshine of the Feuteventurian sky came as a welcome surprise to the team members, most of whom had travelled from northern areas of Europe. After the team had met up and unloaded their bikes, they settled down for the first of many hearty meals to ponder the week ahead.

After dinner the team were welcomed by Transitions Optical's Roland Allen and introduced to the coaching team. Peter Reid, former world champion Ironman triathlete, explained to the group they had a special camp in store.

On the first morning each of the riders was put onto a turbo trainer, on their bikes, to demonstrate their cycling style to the coaches, who looked on with a critical eye and suggested adjustments to the bikes. The aim was to ensure each rider adopted an efficient cycling position. The team was then kitted out in branded Oakley Activated by Transitions sports gear to keep the sand-laden Feuteventurian wind at bay. As well as the promotional aspects of the clothing the team also face many months of training so good quality, functional apparel is essential. Especially, the team discovered, in areas such as where the rider meets the saddle.

The team was also provided with Oakley Activated by Transitions Flak Jacket eyewear, and this became the



eyewear of choice for most team members over the next seven days as a defence against the sun, wind and sand.

One particularly popular piece of clothing was a lurid green Oakley Activated by Transitions teeshirt which most of the team spent much of the week wearing while not on the bike. Fiona Boshier was immediately dubbed the 'green monster' in hers.

Over the next few days the team

completed a series of rides through the mountains, spending nearly 20 hours in the saddle and covering nearly 300 miles. The week culminated in a seven-hour ride covering 86 miles of Feuteventura's toughest terrain.

Each day started with a flexibility and balance yoga session hosted by lead coach, and former world champion of the double Ironman, Mario Huys. Throughout the week

the team explored the island on rides of increasing intensity while in the evenings the group were given a series of talks. All activities were interspersed with huge amounts of food.

In the cool of the evening

The evening talks proved popular. In a talk on mental training Huys tried to explain the nature of endurance sport and urged the team not to do too much too soon. He gave an example of trying to train a donkey to take part in a horse race.

'You can't make the donkey into a horse, what you have to do is make a very fast donkey,' he said. 'You have to accept you are what you are. What the other athletes are doing is of no regard to you,' he said. The mental acceptance of this fact was crucial in sport.

The evening session on day two focused on nutrition, which was already a popular topic of conversation among the team. This was led by Reid, four times world Ironman Triathlon champion. 'As a science I consider nutrition to be in the dark ages, we just don't understand it and there's no magic formula,' he said.

He went on to offer a range of tips. At breakfast the next day there was much comment on the team's individual breakfast selections. It was clear not everyone had taken a pledge to alter their diet too much.

Midweek Roland Allen reminded the team of the purpose of the Ironman project, namely promoting and explaining the benefits of Oakley Activated by Transitions' eyewear.

He said Transitions wanted to go further than simply win customers. It wanted customers who would be advocates for the brand and he described the many tools Transitions had developed to try to make that easier for optical practices to achieve.

Creating advocates was a five-year process, he said. This would involve TV advertising, research and providing point-of-sale materials for optical practices. This would drive the promotion of the Activated by Transitions' product family which includes Oakley, Drivewear and the Rupp+Hubrach product Silvershade. The Oakley Transitions' Ironman Team was part of the process of building a buzz around the 'Activated by' concept, he added.

Most of the athletes were concentrating on the training and the many hours of exercise they already have, and will be expected to complete over the coming months, but by this

point in the week the riders were beginning to make more comments about the usefulness of the eyewear. Along with the style, all agreed the product was effective in combating the rapidly changing light conditions, glare and the sand-laden wind. Most of the team members have a strong sports element to their practice and said they would be providing favourable reports to their customers.

The UK team member Boshier was happy to give her views on the Oakley Activated by Transitions eyewear. 'I had always used contact lenses for sports but contact lenses are no good on the bike because they dry out too quickly,' she said. 'I have found the Oakley Activated by Transitions' prescription eyewear to be really good. They are great for what we are doing, especially in these conditions.'

The optician lurking within each team member shone through when Allen mentioned in-store education aids and point-of-sale material to help boost sales. Most of the team members have strong sports eyewear sales and own their own businesses. They are keen to understand more about the benefits of Oakley Activated by Transitions so they can explain the concept to their customers. Most freely admit that in Europe and South Africa such products are a lucrative business to be in and welcomed point-of-sales support.

Most also operate in countries where sports eyewear is an established business and sunglass sales are made predominantly through optical practices and it is perhaps this, more than language, that separates the UK from the other nations in the team.

Professional sports coach Huys also gave his opinion on the eyewear from a sports science perspective.

'Sunglasses in sport are very important because they take away visual fatigue, reduce glare and protect the eyes which is one less thing to think about. It makes the world feel safer for the athlete and they can concentrate on what they are doing,' he said.

Huys says the additional concentration this allows means the athlete expends more effort on the sport. This can be considerable. 'I have a large range of quality sunglasses but I have noticed a big difference with these Oakley Activated by Transitions' glasses this week,' he said. 'With varying light conditions you don't have to take them off, when the sun gets stronger they darken down. I am surprised.' ●



Fiona's progress

For one UK team member, Fiona Boshier, the camp was also her honeymoon. She was married the day before the camp started and brought along her new husband Darren.

She has had a manic first quarter to her year (see feature April 6) getting married and moving house, while trying to fit in all the necessary training. She found the training camp a great relief after the complex arrangements of all the other things going on in her life.

Fiona is a keen athlete and has played hockey at an international level, so is used to competitive sports.

Cycling is not a sport she has participated in a lot and she did find herself at the back of the groups. This wasn't helped by her bike. Many of the group had the latest bikes featuring carbon frames, lightweight wheels and aerobars. Boshier's bike was a second-hand model and during the week her rear gear mechanism suffered a catastrophic failure. Transitions kindly hired her a bike and her speed and smoothness of cycling immediately improved.

As with all of the athletes, Boshier's biggest issue with the training regime is finding the time to fit in all the work required but she is sure she will make it to the finish line.

She is a highly motivated individual, her running is strong, her swimming is improving and she is totally committed to improving her cycling technique. She has the perfect training partner in new husband Darren and the two train regularly together.