

Bucket List Adventures (the beginning).

My bucket list adventures really started in London 2022. Like many, I wanted to run London, just once, to see what all the fuss was about. Not being a fan of running spring marathons, I seized the opportunity when it was being held in October 2022 as part of post covid recovery and raised a chunk of money for a charity that meant a lot to me...and developed plantar fasciitis. Naturally.

With the help of a friend-turned-coach, I got to the start line—and the finish—using a run-walk strategy. Oddly, that made the day even more special. I soaked everything in, limped away with a chronic injury, but wouldn't change a thing.

After London, instead of collecting medals, I collected injuries: proximal hamstring tendinopathy, a grumpy rotator cuff, and a handful of random strains. The injuries, coupled with hormones have been my tight rope ever since. Despite being diligent with rehab (conveniently ignoring the part where I ran a marathon injured), I had a full-blown perimenopause-fuelled “F#\$k it!” moment and in June 2024 entered IM Austria for 2025. My logic: if I wasn't fit for 2025, I'd defer to 2026. If not 2026... well, that might be the end of my running.

Knowing that I would need a different approach to training, I was grateful to be introduced to Coach Mike. Mike is no ordinary coach; he is a physiotherapist with an impressive background of some crazy endurance events. Straight talking, honest, sensible and so incredibly knowledgeable; we got on really well from our initial chat and Austria 2025 was a go.

Training started in November 2024, building a solid base across all three disciplines while being kind to my body. I was already active most days with swimming, cycling, running, and strength training. Mike shaped that into something purposeful and helped me navigate rehab without the constant fear of making injuries worse.

I can't tell you when the training ramped up because I am not sure that it did. There was a gentle squeeze here, a subtle push there. I trusted the process, so I never obsessed over volume. I was consistently hitting 10+ hours a week, with “rest days” usually being easy swims or spins. No epic weekend warrior sessions—just steady brick sessions, easy runs, swims, 3–4 hour rides, and, of course, the strength work.

A lot of my training ended up being solo (cue tiny violins). I tried to make run club when I could and attempted to rope in friends for bike rides, but with double sessions squeezed around a full-time job, I mostly had to train whenever the window opened—and that rarely matched anyone else's schedule.

But I did gain one brilliant training buddy: my daughter, Alice. She'd scan my plan and join me for runs, pop up along the route to keep me company, or have something cooking for when I got home. On a couple of occasions, she even acted as my personal rescue service, calling to redirect me when she saw—via Garmin—that I was, once again, lost in Little Kinton. Honestly, Alice is the real hero of this whole story.

By the time we headed to Austria in June, I'd banked roughly:

- 50 miles of swimming
- 2,500 miles of cycling
- 400 miles of running
- 50 hours of strength work

My biggest sessions weren't wild: a few 3km swims, an 80-mile ride (with the odd 130-mile week, plus one 200-mile cycle holiday week), and longest run of 16 miles using run:walk. My longest continuous run was only 12 miles.

Run:walk became a big part of my strategy. I knew running was where my injuries thrived, so I had to be realistic and think about recovery and maintaining consistent training. I experimented



with different ratios of run to walk to find what felt sustainable and adaptable for race day. The key – they are not interval training!

A past version of me would've panicked about the numbers, but consistency was everything. I felt strong, I loved the routine, and my body slowly adapted. My feet even started behaving, and I managed a few back-to-back run days for the first time in two years. Was Ironman training the magic fix for my injury-prone body? Probably not. I think it was Mike. Definitely Mike.

That's not to say it was all smooth sailing. The swims loomed over me every week, and for reasons unknown I wasn't loving open water like I usually do. The bike was my happy place—I put in some serious work there, often grinding out long sets at 80% FTP and discovering that I am a bit of a diesel engine. And the running... surprisingly fine. A few gentle speed sessions, nothing heroic. Only once did I finish a run feeling truly broken, on the hottest day of the year after leaving my nutrition far too late. Those who have been there will know how that manifested!

When it came to nutrition, I practised and practised and practised. By race day I had a rock-solid plan: what to eat and drink, when to take it, and exactly what was available on course. If there was one thing I obsessed over—on paper, in my head, with Simon, and with anyone who stood still long enough—it was this. Well, this *and* the terrifying possibility of my goggles snapping mid-swim. That one kept me up at night.

Race week!

We drove to Austria over two days, stopping overnight in Metz. The travelling party consisted of me and two Simons: husband Simon (1), my unpaid personal assistant for the entire trip, and friend Simon (2), who was also racing. We'd done our homework on the route and accommodation. Simon (1) and I had a simple but non-negotiable checklist: on-route, easy parking, and food nearby. The Novotel in Metz ticked every box. So, imagine my confusion when we rolled into the *centre* of Metz, complete with funfair and busy streets. After circling twice, Simon (1) finally spotted the underground car park next to the hotel.



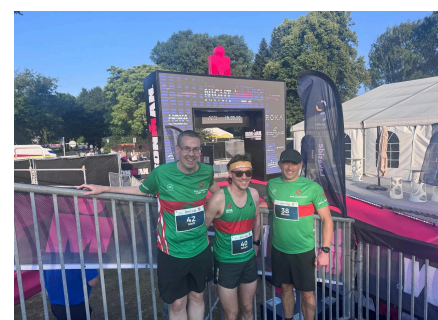
As we started down the ramp, the Guardian Angel of Ironman Wannabes appeared—walking *up* the ramp, shaking their head vigorously. Did they also do a dramatic throat-slit gesture? Possibly. Either way, the message was clear: our car, complete with two bikes on the roof, was *not* fitting under that barrier. Disaster averted.



We then caused absolutely no chaos whatsoever by blocking the entrance while we removed both bikes, before heading inside for check-in and, ideally, a stiff drink. I nipped to the loo and returned to find both Simons looking baffled. Turns out... there are two Novotels in Metz. And this was not the one we'd booked. The correct one—naturally—was just off the route and had perfectly accessible parking with no bike-decapitating obstacles. We eventually found it, laughed it off over dinner, and tucked my bike safely into bed.

Austria at last.

Our Airbnb just outside Klagenfurt was lovely, and over the first evening our small but mighty support crew arrived. They were buzzing to earn their own place in the Ironman Hall of Fame by running the 5km Night Run on Friday. It promised to be flat and fast, and the boys delivered—every time was rapid, even those at the back. Suspiciously rapid. Turns out



a misplaced cone had sent runners to the home straight early. But hey, they raced the course they were given, and have earned a tiny share of the dot in their future M-dot tattoos.

Race day!



Race day arrived and—what the hell—I slept *amazingly*. Woke up feeling *incredible*. Everything was sorted the day before, so all I had to do was show up, tweak my transition setup, and keep moving forward until there was a medal around my neck and a beer in my hand.

The toilets were... an experience. No queue for the women, while the men were piling into our blocks because theirs were rammed. Not surprising when only 14% of the field were women.

With all the essentials done, it was time to say goodbye to Simon (1) and top supporters, Matt and Adam, and head to the swim start. I'd been emotional during taper and expected to be a puddle by now, but I was calm and ready.

That lasted until a woman in front of me hugged her son—who, in my mind, looked exactly like Charlie. We locked eyes, she beamed with pride, and we both burst into tears. Not ideal when you're about to rely on a watertight goggle seal.

Swim

I'd been so excited for this swim. Lake Wörthersee is stunning, and I couldn't wait to enter the Lendkanal with crowds lining the banks and swim under the iconic bridge toward the exit. The rolling start set us off in small groups, a few seconds apart. Normally I don't mind a bit of open-water chaos, but this was next-level. Clear water, huge lake, yet somehow limbs everywhere for the entire swim.

The course was simple: 1km (ish) straight, left for 500m, left again for another 1km (ish), then into the Lendkanal for the final stretch (1km ish). Everything was going smoothly—just the occasional rogue swim cap adjustment—and I was keeping my effort calm as the course narrowed.

I lifted my head entering the canal, grinning as I passed under the bridge. Less than 400m to go. It was everything I'd hoped for... until *WHACK*. A foot connected squarely with my chin. My teeth clamped down, taking a chunk of my tongue with them. With a rusty taste in my mouth, my whole body jolted, and my left calf knotted into cramp.

I did *not* remain calm. I couldn't get my head above water. Bodies crashed into me, arms dragged across my back, pulling me under. For a moment, I genuinely thought it was game over. It probably lasted seconds, but it felt like forever. I knew the only way to calm down was to breathe out, so I let myself stay underwater and exhale slowly. Under the surface was the only place I felt safe enough to reset. A couple of cycles of that, plus some frantic foot-wiggling to release the cramp, and I managed to move forward toward the red carpet.

The moment my feet hit the ground—bam—the calf cramped again. My brain went straight into troubleshooting mode. I rarely cramp, so the only explanation I could come up with was low electrolytes. It was a warm morning, and the pros had even been banned from wearing wetsuits due to water temperature. I ran up the red carpet to my bike—something I hadn't planned to do to save energy—but I needed movement to loosen the calf, and instinctively it felt like the right call.

Bike

Transition went smoothly and I headed out onto the bike course. The moment I settled onto the aerobars, my upper back tightened. I won't lie, I felt battered and I was worried about the 112 miles of cycling ahead of me. Still, I had plenty of electrolytes, carb drink, and nutrition on board—though my bars had melted into a sort of warm, sticky mush that I had to smush together into a vaguely edible lump. It was heating up out there.

I'd been so excited for this part. The bike is my favourite discipline, and riding through Austria's scenery was something I'd been dreaming about. So, feeling that rough so early started to put a dampener on things. But I wasn't having it. I gave myself a stern talking-to, looked around, took in

the mountains and the sunshine, and the big gurning grin returned. This was always going to hurt; but I was in control of how I responded to that. Today, that meant smiling and pushing on.

I felt mostly in control—until I glanced at my power. It was way lower for my perceived effort. No matter what I did, the numbers wouldn't match how hard I felt I was working. I couldn't figure out why. Yes, there were long stretches of false flat, but I usually handle those fine. Still, forcing watts I didn't have would've been madness, so I ditched the numbers and focused on feel.

It wasn't until the final climb of lap one, the Rupertiberg, that it clicked: it wasn't me, it wasn't the road—it was the heat. The climb was completely exposed and absolutely baking. Heat from above, heat radiating off the tarmac. I later heard rumours the road surface hit 39°C. Whether that's true or not, it felt like it. The silver lining was that once you crested Rupertiberg, you had a mostly flat or downhill roll back to town, where I could grab my special needs bag and restock before heading out for lap two.

Despite the rough patches, the ride was full of highlights. The route was stunning, the scenery breathtaking, and the supporters were on another level. There was a photographer along one of the false flat stretches towards the latter parts of the lap, I knew that if I saw him on lap 2, bar any mechanicals, I had the ride in the bag. He captured my crazy wave of excitement perfectly and shouted massive cheers of support as I rode by.



Then there were the four lads on the climb near Faaker See. By lap 2 I was throwing water over myself constantly, so when I saw them each holding two lidless bidons, I pointed at my head and yelled for them to drench me. They *loved* it. They formed a little tunnel and absolutely soaked me while cheering and singing. It was ridiculous and brilliant and exactly the kind of moment that keeps you going.

Run

For me, the run is always about survival, and this marathon was no different. I came into transition knowing I needed to slow everything down—it was going to be a long one. The first couple of kilometres were all about scanning the body: calf cramp—gone; back—fine; stomach—happy; legs—ticking over. I had a 10:2 run:walk programmed into my watch. I had my carb drink, gels, and a plan to top up with familiar on-course nutrition.

Running into the central park area, where the finish line lived, I could hear a constant stream of “You are an Ironman!” echoing around the trees. Hundreds of people were already done. Humbling but fine—I was doing my own thing and genuinely loving it. Yes, I was jealous of anyone sporting both wristbands (the sign of being on the final lap), but it didn't feel long before I looked down and saw two bands on my own arm.

Lap 2 was where things got interesting. I stopped for a quick portaloo break (no drama, just a wee), but almost immediately afterwards a stitch-like pain crept across my upper abdomen. Then came dizziness, blurry vision, and a headache during my walk breaks. My first thought was, “Well, running feels okay—maybe just don't walk!” Thankfully, a tiny sensible voice reminded me that this was stupidity talking. It was 35°C, and although I'd stuck to my plan, I'd been grabbing water—not electrolytes—at aid stations so I could drink and throw it over myself. My salts were clearly off.

I corrected it slowly over the next hour, sipping electrolytes and cola until the dizziness and headache eased. The abdominal pain, however, was stubborn. Running sent sharp pains up into my lungs and shoulders. I adjusted the run:walk ratio, gradually walking more. At around 8km to go, I realised I'd walked an entire mile—and it wasn't much slower than the previous ones, just far less painful. With 6km left, I made the call: walk 5km, run the final 1km.

As I headed back into the park, the darkness made everything feel surreal. I spotted the final kilometre marker and started running again, relieved that the pain had eased. Ahead, under a huge floodlight, were Simon (1), Matt, Adam, and Simon (2), all cheering like mad. I was so excited—and so delirious—that I got completely spooked by a pedestrian pushing their bike across my path. Depending on who tells the story, they knocked me over or I panicked and tripped myself up. Either way, I hit the ground in slow motion. The crowd gasped, fell silent, and then erupted when I got back up and carried on to finish the final KM.

Nothing compares to running down that red carpet. I was buzzing—cheering the crowd, egging them on, throwing air punches like a maniac. I rang the first-timers' bell and sprinted for the arch as the announcer said, "Lorraine Parsons, you are an Ironman!"



Medal around my neck, I babbled something to a volunteer about falling over a bike (she wasn't impressed) and wandered out of the finish area. It never even occurred to me to pose under the arch for THAT photo—I just saw Simon leaning over the barrier with Alice and Charlie on a video call. He'd phoned them so they could watch me finish, and one of them screen-recorded it. That video is my favourite souvenir of the whole day.

I grabbed my beer, stepped into the real world, and the tears came—big, messy, unstoppable tears. They still come now when I think about it. I can't fully explain why this meant so much, but it did. It still does. I am so proud of myself and the memories that were made during this whole journey.