



GETTING STARTED IN MULTISPORT



You're thinking about doing your first triathlon or duathlon. Or you've got a friend or family member who is thinking about it. Maybe you've done a couple on a lark and now want to get going in a more organized way.

You know it takes some time, effort and energy to train for multisport racing, and the races themselves are often challenging, with special challenges that first time or two out. Some multisport athletes do train a great deal, and some races, especially the longer ones, are very challenging. But many of us live quite normal lives.

While there are the Ironman distance races you see on television, the vast majority of triathlons are much shorter. The Olympic or International distance consists of a 1.5k (0.93 mile) swim, a 40k (24.8 mile) bike, and a 10k (6.2 mile) run. Increasingly popular is the sprint, with distances ranging from a 1/3-1/2 mile swim, a 10-15 mile bike, and a 2.5-4 mile run.

The standard distance duathlon is a race that usually has three segments involving two sports, running and cycling, in the run-bike-run sequence. The duathlon is a great way to get into multisport racing, especially if you don't how to swim or don't like it much. The usual distances are a 2-3 mile run, an 8-15 mile bike, with the second run the same as the first.

For an Olympic distance triathlon, setting out first to get to the starting line and then cross the finish line happy and healthy without worrying about speed, you need train no more than 5-6 hours per week, total in all three

sports, for three months or so, depending on your level of conditioning when you begin. You can do the "sprint" triathlons and the standard distance duathlons on 3-4 hours a week. You can find a variety of introductory training materials on www.usatriathlon.org.

There are many sources of information about available races. The USA Triathlon website includes an event calendar with over 3,100 sanctioned events. Magazines like *Triathlete* publish race calendars and/or information about upcoming races. Independent websites also publish race calendars. You can find them, for example, at: www.trifind.com, www.com and www.beginnertriathlete.com.

For your first race, I suggest choosing one that's reasonably close to home. In addition to the race itself, in multisport racing there are race logistics to deal with so the fewer distractions you have just getting to the event, the better. For most races, you will likely have to register in advance, on the web or through the mail. Many races also require that you check in the day before the race to pick up your race numbers, swim cap, timing chip and the customary goody bag. That's another reason why picking one close to home is a good idea. However, some races do have morning of the race registration and/or check-in.

As to skills, as in any race, while you do need to be a good athlete to go fast in a triathlon or duathlon, with very ordinary athletic skills you can finish the race, not going very fast at all, and thoroughly enjoy the experience for its own sake. If you can swim in a straight line,

keep your bike upright while moving forward and put one foot in front of the other on the run, you can do a triathlon.

But the most important skills are the mental ones: Why are you doing a triathlon or duathlon or this race in particular? What do you expect to get out of the experience? In what time do you reasonably expect to finish, with "reasonably" being the operative word?

The goals that you set ought to take into account your experience, your natural athletic ability and speed, and the intensity with which you expect to train. First and foremost, your goal(s) should be rational and realistic, for you. I suggest that for your first race at least, your primary goal should be simply to finish, as I like to say, happily and healthily.

Most folks nowadays start with a sprint triathlon or duathlon. There will be plenty of future opportunities to do longer races. And please, don't think you have to do an Olympic distance race for it to be "a real triathlon." Every triathlon, regardless of length, is real for those who do them. So give it a whirl.

As the great Dave Scott said a long time ago, "I encourage all triathletes to reach for your goals, whether they be to win or just to try. The trying is everything."

*Dr. Steve Jonas has been a multisport athlete for 27 years, is the author of *Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals*, currently in its 23rd year of publication (2nd ed. new in 2006), and is a professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University in New York. Visit his website at www.ordinarymortals.info.*