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Sprint triathlons ideal for beginners

BY MIKE FOLEY • STAFF WRITER • JUNE 23, 2009

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While Ironman dreams are fine, you don't need to spend an entire day competing in an event to get the feel of a triathlon.

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Sprint triathlons range from Olympic distance – 1,500-meter swim, 40 kilometer bike, 10K run – to distances so abbreviated a race can be completed in less than an hour. And with summer here, there are a wide number of sprint triathlons offered around the Upstate.

Saturday's Caine Halter YMCA Sprint Triathlon is Saturday, and the first-time event already had 310 entries as of last Monday, heading toward its limit of 450 entries. The Caine Halter race is a typical beginner's race.

With novice-friendly distances of a 300-yard swim, a 9-mile bike and then a 5K run, participants can get a taste of triathlons without making training a full-time job. Many sprint triathlons also offer less-worrisome pool swims which are a comfort for those paranoid about being thrashed by flailing arms and legs in a mass start in murky lake water.

The Caine Halter Tri even has a friendly finishing 5K, on a closed course, the Greenville Hospital System Swamp Rabbit Tram Trail.

Other local beginner-friendly triathlons include the Upstate Y Sprint Triathlon Series. The seven-race series sponsored by YMCAs in the Upstate, has three races left, in Union, Laurens and Pickens counties, in July, August and September, respectively.

Each of the races starts with a 300-yard pool swim, and all of them conclude with a 5K run. Each race has a different length bike leg, varying from 14.5 miles at the Union race, to 12.3 miles in Laurens, and 20K (12.4 miles) in Pickens.

One of the largest triathlons in South Carolina is the Greenville Triathlon set for Aug. 16 this year. Held at the Westside Aquatic Center, the race had more than 500 finishers in 2008.

The race distances are: 400-meter swim, a 15-mile bike and a concluding 5K run.

While adults might think they have all the fun to themselves, there are sprint triathlons with kid-friendly distances available.

The Tri to Cure Triathlon held each year at Furman University is set for Aug. 15 and is geared for youths ages 6-15. Age-appropriate distances are a hallmark of the event as 6-10 year old swim 100 meters, bike 2 ½ miles, and run ½ mile. While 11-15 year olds swim 200 meters, bike 5 miles and run 1 mile.

Another triathlon for youngsters – ages 5-12 -- is held as part of the Tri the Ridge Sprint Triathlon at the Pickens County YMCA. The distances are manageable as they include a 100-yard pool swim, 3-mile bike ride and a ½-mile run.



Upstate triathletes can test their skill in a number of upcoming competitions. (Alan DeVorsey)

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