

Triple Bypass survived

Kayaks are tough, but oh those bales

"By the end of the day tomorrow, you will hate us both," pronounced one of the two race directors during a mandatory athlete's meeting the night before the Adidas Triple Bypass. "You will become intimate with the course and come to despise it."

This was so typical of me always in search of a new challenge. I never before had I entered a race that required more than running.

In the Triple Bypass, running is just one of three primary events — kayaking and mountain biking round out the day.

And if that's not enough, just for kicks the race directors threw in four "mystery tasks."

Looking around, I saw my competitors — 35 teams of three, which were handpicked out of the 350 teams that had submitted athletic resumes. Sitting next to me were world-class athletes, Navy SEALs, Marines, an American Gladiator and a green-haired Generation X-type with a pierced tongue. What the hell was I thinking?!

RONNI ROSS



RUNNING

Later that night, I told my teammates, Duane McDowell and Doug Wilde, that I was sure I was coming down with the stomach flu. Doug, who also happens to be my husband, rolled his eyes and informed me matter-of-factly that I was just having prerace jitters.

The June 23 event, which has nothing to do with heart surgery, is patterned after longer, more involved adventure races such as the eight-day European Raid Gauloises and its American counterpart known as Eco-Challenge.

As a gun blast signaled the start of the race held at Castaic Lake, we sprinted down a hill toward our mountain bikes. Leaping off the mine, I pulled into the pack of racers, screaming down a steep hill toward the lake to begin the kayak segment.

"Hey, I have a flat tire!" someone next to me yelled. "So do I!" echoed another competitor. One by one, flattened tires were discovered, and, as my teammates began to take joy in the other teams' misfortunes, I realized that I, too, had a flat. Surprise! Mystery task No. 1: Repair a flat tire.

After that chore was tackled, we jumped into our two inflatable kayaks and began to paddle. Blow-up kayaks are nearly impossible to steer, and I learned that when you're the front-oar person in a two-person boat, your job is not only to paddle but to take repeated blows to the head.

"Don't worry, honey. It's all part of the fun," my husband and best mate assured me. I secretly think he enjoyed the experience.

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Mysteries add to punishing event

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As we completed our zigzag route around the buoyed course, there were only a few boats behind us. I started to panic at the thought that we might finish the race in last place. Not that finishing last is so bad, but I didn't want to let my teammates down, particularly since we had trained so hard for the mountain bike phase.

I prefer sports in which my feet are on the ground, and I tend to shy away from any activity that incorporates such terminology as "face plant" to describe a type of fall. It didn't help that just two weeks prior to the race, I learned firsthand what that kind of fall feels like.

As we readied for the biking segment, race staffers motioned us over to an area where a bunch of tents were laying on the ground. Mystery task No. 2: Pitch a tent. Thankfully, my teammates have camped out enough to be good at this. In a few long, one tent stood proudly in place, allowing us to move on to the bikes.

The ride would take us around a 5.5-mile loop three times. We successfully made our way around the loop the first time, but my fears were not relieved at the thought of having to do it again. The course contained ferocious downhill switchbacks, narrow single-track portions and a ride through a 50-foot long tunnel rigged with fire hoses and two feet of mud.

The jewel in the crown of this race, however, was a 600-yard stretch affectionately referred to by the directors as Puke Hill. Riding up this monster proved impossible, so to negotiate this stretch, participants had to carry, push or drag their bikes.

White-knuckled, I made it through the three laps, but by the

time we finished, we were in 30th place. My partners were patient with me, but I could tell it was frustrating for them to have to wait for me as other teams zipped past.

As we reached the transition area and parked our bikes, I finally felt a little calmer. Then came the third surprise event: a board game. Race staffers flashed a board before us with various items attached to it for five seconds. Our mission was to recall as many of the items as possible and write them down. Failure to come up with the required number would cost us a two-minute delay before being allowed to try again.

After playing this game at numerous baby showers, I knew I could ace it and was glad I could help my teammates in at least one part of the race. Seconds later, we were done and given the nod to move on to the last event — a trail run composed of two more laps around the same loop we'd done on the bikes.

We struggled on the course, but running is what all three of us do best, so we managed to catch a dozen or so teams during this last phase of the race. As we crept up on team after team, I kept hearing Duane mutter under his breath, "That's it, come to Papa."

When we rounded the final bend with the finish line in sight, we discovered that the race directors had one more cruel surprise in store for us. A quarter of a mile from the end, a staff person pointed at a stack of hay bales and said, "You gotta carry one of those to the finish line."

Completely exhausted, we heaved the bale up about two feet off the ground and agreed it was the heaviest 65 pounds we'd ever felt. We each grabbed one end and lugged it across the line,



Marc Herman / Special to the Daily News
Ronni Ross and her two teammates pass the test, crossing the line of the Triple Bypass while lugging a heavy bale of hay.

completing the race in 15th place in 5 hours, 22 minutes.

Upon finishing, I reveled in the feeling of having risen to a challenge that truly tested me. But the delight went deeper than that.

Duane summed it up best.

"When you do a team event, you don't have to wait until after the race is over to share the

experience," he said. "It happens during the race, and that's what's most fun about the whole thing. You're all going through the same thing at the same time, and you're sharing your effort."

Staff writer Ronni Ross' running column appears monthly in the Daily News.