



RUBBER, CADENCE & ACID

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EXIT THE WATER and tear off my mirrored goggles, releasing eyes and the rest of my body from the viscous liquid wall pushing against me, breaking it's murky surface tension. I escape into the sand and suck oxygen into my depleted system; I wish I were still in bed. Recovery from the moment lessens the torture and I begin to come to my senses as I cross patches of grass then on tiptoe onto pavement. My chip registers, reminding me that I am alive, and not a very fast swimmer. Forced realization: I am only done with the first part of this triple threat early morning feature. If only that was some sort of metaphor for heart disease, or a Denny's breakfast, or a Chuck Norris movie marathon.

Crossing the carpet with feelings of child-like anticipation mixed with fear of the pain that is to come. I graciously wipe my feet as I greet my companion for the next hour of my life. Homage is paid: bending down, strapping carbon fiber and poly foam to my head, ratcheting rigid plastic to my feet, and sliding on synthetic leather encasing my hands. I filter UV from my eyes and break the shackles of my outlaw. Her crime is speed and the energy she contains could melt the paint off her body, exposing her hand

built components. We grace through the mounting zone, ready to create beautiful havoc, and I swing my leg over the carbon and titanium frame. My feet lock into place, harnessing training, potential energy, and technology. As one, we charge forward, cadence speed increasing, gear ratios changing, warming my pistons for battle. It has only just begun.

I look forward to the punishment, the speed and the generation of power measured in watts – the same way one measures the strength of a power drill. The spirits of competitors are screwed. This is my time to fly. My time to impress. This is my time to advance, to widen the gap, leaving me victorious. I pick up speed and begin to pick off the competition; I grin and pedal harder. Breathing comes easy, but the body burns. It can take it, I tell myself, as if there's a choice. The summer morning bends around me.

Testing limits, I exploit technology. Colors melt together, forming abstract shapes blurred by speed: Monet would be content. Bladed spokes cut through the air like lasers. High dish carbon wheels hum against smooth rubber on pavement. Sensors transmit wireless signals to LCD readouts. Black braided





carbon fiber cranks transfer torque tenaciously to steel teeth and CNC sprockets. Vibrations diminished by airfoil shaped carbon tubing and brazed titanium directs steel cables. Air excuses itself as my dynamic shape slips through the crowded atmosphere of molecules. I am gone before time even arrives.

PLACES TO OVERTAKE until I catch the leader then create separation from those who want to run me down. I pedal and calculate cadence efficiency against my readouts, average speed up, no biting in my legs, lactic acid still bearable, muscles still tolerating the poison which is a product of muscle contractions and burning energy. Switching rhythms, fast spin, easy gear, click, click, slower spin, higher gear – deliberate chess moves balanced on six inches of rubber at 24 miles an hour. Click, click: I push harder. Crossing streets blocked by black and white. Their red and blue strobes stand out starkly this early in the morning haze. I lean into turns, pedals encroaching the ground, almost scraping. Tar filled broken concrete splits up masses of grey. Their black lines jump up and down like an EKG machine delivers pulse. Yellow lines stripe the bland streets. Over the multiple miles of rolling roadway, there are no crowds, no one to cheer. I can unwrap a Power Bar and eat it in 3 bites without a hesitation in my cadence. Trees and wildlife are not impressed. Solitary torture dotted by the occasional competitor who falls to my fitness, they witness power for an instant, then I am gone.

Keeping a cool mind, I sip on the elixir of energy resting between my forearms, mounted to the handlebars. Powdered Gatorade, Hammer Gel, and sodium capsules -- The liquid churns in rhythm of the riding. I put hope into the potential energy; it propels me for many miles to come. Leaving my body, sweat takes flight, vaporizing in wind currents. I nod my head and woot toward fellow competitors, exchanging glances and airstreams. We share a moment in passing, same scenery, same shadows, same air in our lungs and on our bodies. I can feel their curiosity; they beg me to tell how much further until the turn around. In time they find out, then like me, continue back with carbon wheels spinning and lungs burning towards the end of this stage.

Coasting into the transition zone, with a twist of my heels, I unlock and dismount. Gravity returns to my legs. I mournfully part with my titanium and carbon horse, leaving efficiency behind. Slipping into road runners and dropping brain buckets, a deep breath taken in as I hit the split button on my wrist, and lift my foot in stride. There is no escaping the pain, pooled lactic acid shifts and hardens tired muscles, conditioning kicks in.

TO CONQUER the final burn, the mind relies on training and self-confidence to carry it through. There are no more mechanical advantages of gear ratios or space age technology or aerodynamics. Running is physical contact with the ground. You pound on it, it pounds on you: the same beating given throughout history. Running is a part of human heritage, and hours spent covering pavement and trail with gel filled shoes is my honor to the past. Conditioning is the only reliance. For my own sake, training better pull me through.

A triathlon is made from tiers of agony that beat you down with laser guided precision - they want to see you suffer and fail. If a triathlon is a killer, the swimming is a slow, watery death, thus making cycling a journey through purgatory. And if hours spent training do not pay off, and this beast gets the best of me, after I leave the bike, the last ten thousand meters running will surely feel like hell. Finishing then, brings ascension