

Swim, Bike, Bonk: Confessions of a Reluctant Triathlete

Will McGough

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Will McGough's irreverent memoir *Swim, Bike, Bonk* is about surviving the Ironman triathlon.

The Ironman involves 2.4 miles of swimming, 112 miles of cycling, and 26.2 miles of running. It is an epic race attempted by only the most elite athletes...and adventure seekers like McGough. He shocked his friends, family, and body by signing up for the race though he was woefully unprepared. In diary format, McGough shares his story of training for the Ironman, undertaking the race and recovering from it, and processing his experience.

The story of this impossible adventure is captivating. McGough is about as unlikely a hero as they come. Previous to beginning his training, his longest run ever was eight miles, and he only had three months to train. While he is sometimes reluctant, more often his voice brims with gung-ho, foolhardy, youthful bravado, plus generous doses of self-deprecation. McGough's humor shines throughout, but most in his unselfconscious presentation of the physical toll that the race takes, including the difficulty of pee breaks when certain extremities have gone numb and the dreaded chafing of, well, everything.

A foreword by the winner of the first Ironman race in 1978, Gordon Haller, is an insightful addition, sharing memories of his race and the way the sport has changed in the decades since. The book reverberates with one question: Why? Why on earth would you do this? It's a question that McGough wrestles with throughout his training and even after the race, both for himself and on behalf of the many others who tackle it. While possible answers are many, the book reveals a universal truth: in the face of insurmountable odds, basic questions have answers that are hardly simple.

Frightening in its honesty, *Swim, Bike, Bonk* is an inviting personal story of a quest to complete the Ironman triathlon.

MELISSA WUSKE (November / December 2019)

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