

Tri This Workout

Kick your butt into shape this year (and score serious bragging rights too) by completing a badass triathlon. By **HK Staff**



It's the start of another year, and everyone's out on a resolution-fueled high, joining gyms and yoga studios as they vow to make this year their fittest yet. Ho-hum, we say. That's all well and good, but it can be exceedingly hard to motivate yourself without a goal to work towards. Why not set a super-sized target this year—and do a triathlon? Read on to find out everything you need to know about tri-training. And if you're setting your sights a little lower this year, well, we've got some advice for you, too. Triathlons come in all shapes and sizes. They range from a sprint, where you swim 750 meters, bike 20 kilometers and run five kilometers, to an Ironman, which is made up of a 3.8-kilometer swim, a 180-kilometer bike ride and a full marathon tacked onto the end. Let's break it down:

Swim: For many people this is the most daunting bit, since most triathlons are held in open water where visibility is often poor, there are no black lines along the bottom and swimming at close quarters can be terrifying.

Bike: Most people survive—even enjoy—their first triathlon riding a garden-variety mountain bike that gets you from A to B. But if you get bitten by the bug, you'll need to upgrade, and swapping that comfort for the speed and lightweight features of road racing tires has its cost: a literal pain in the butt.

Run: That most natural form of human motion, running, turns into a real challenge in the triathlon. Why? Because even the best runners never forget that awful, trussed-up-like-a-turkey feeling in their quads when they finally get to dismount the bike and begin running. As you take your first steps, your legs feel like jelly encased in steel and you wonder how you are ever going to go the distance. But you will.



Meet Your New Role Models

Three local triathletes—who claim anyone can race like them—share their tips, tricks and training tales. By **Lisa Lee**

Newbies, calm your nerves: triathletes come in all ages, sizes and abilities.

Take **Andrew Wright**, 27, who runs Tribal, a sports store in Happy Valley (See "Get the Gear," p.13). Wright is a sportsman by nature, having been a keen swimmer since the age of 10 as well as a strong runner. People with experience in either sport find it easy to transition into triathlons. "Cycling is an easy sport [to do]," he says, "and lots of people come into [triathlons] through either swimming or running."



A former professional triathlete who represented Hong Kong in the 2012 Asian Games, Wright decided to take a one-year hiatus to concentrate on his business and coach other triathletes. But he misses the allure of competition despite the many hours of training it requires: "It's a great sport to get you outside and allows you to be competitive... When I was in full training I did approximately one big race per month, depending on the distance. I did Olympic distances, and those are certainly more challenging due to the level of intensity involved."

Training at that elite level isn't for the weak-hearted: Wright's competitive training regimen takes up a grueling 20-30 hours per week. That doesn't even take into account the attention into diet, gym sessions and massage therapies that help cool down or prevent injuries.

Wright's advice for beginners? "The best way to get started is to join a triathlon club, where you can pick up free advice and meet people who do similar stuff as you. There's not much pressure either because there's a full range of abilities. Those who get a personal coach later on can definitely see the benefits," he says, "You've just got to love it."

Someone who did just that was **Kate Rutherford**, 38, who has been participating in triathlons for the last two and a half years. After having two children, Rutherford wanted to shed those postnatal pounds. She currently trains for 18 hours a



week—which calls for 6am wake-ups. What keeps her going? "[Doing triathlons] is a good way to keep fit and to stay young," she says. "It gives you lots of energy thanks to the happy endorphins released as you train. Even [if I'm] not training for a few days, I start to feel sluggish. You certainly get a buzz from it."

Racing isn't without its perils—Rutherford broke her collarbone after taking a spill off her bike during one windy race. But she persevered and is gearing up for a big race in March. To those who are just starting out, Rutherford recommends starting small. "You can start biking—just cycle to make your legs get stronger," she says. "For beginners, maybe start off with one bike session for two hours, two two-hour runs and one one-hour swim. So do around five hours a week. If you can find someone who can do it with you and train together, you can get a lot of fun out of it and it can help to motivate you."

Along those lines, our triathletes agree that staying motivated is crucial to succeeding at this sport, and that finding the right support group is the best way to keep your eye on the prize. Not to mix metaphors, but having a companion accompany you down that long road makes it much easier to take the plunge. Thanks to a friend's prompting, **Richard Thornton**, 43, president of the Hong Kong Dragons Triathlon Club, completed his first tri in Phuket back in 2007. In addition to informal group training (like 5:30am cycling sessions twice a week), the Dragons, one of the first triathlon clubs in Hong Kong, regularly organizes regional events—around 11 club triathlons each year and a number of other activities including a national tour.



Thornton comes from an athletic background but saw triathlons as a creative way to escape from the gym. Beyond that, making friends and traveling to races together in a large group adds to the experience. "The camaraderie is amazing," he says. "It's an addictive sport, with the training, the competing and the bike accessories the members like to show each other."

Let's you think that triathlons are only for Ironmen and women like Wright and Rutherford, think again. "Often people who want to get into it are put off by thinking it's only for 'pro-athletes,'" Thornton says. "Twenty-stone (280-pound) men can still do triathlons. Our youngest member is nine, and the oldest ones are in their late 50s [but] are still highly competitive. Some can't swim, but enjoy biking and running."