

THE 100 BEST

RACES ON EARTH

BY BRAD CULP

A good triathlon has to cover all the basics: proper aid stations, a clearly marked course, scenic surroundings, friendly volunteers and all those other little details that make the entry fee feel justified. A great triathlon needs to cover more than just the basics. The scenery has to be so good that you forget about your speedometer for the entire bike leg. The volunteers have to be so friendly that you're inspired to finally volunteer at a race. For a race to be one of the greatest on Earth, participating in it should be a life-changing experience and one that you know you'll never forget.

In this first-of-its-kind feature, we've carefully selected 100 events that stand out from all the rest. We first chose 13 categories of races that represent the full gamut of triathlon—from off-road to women-only to where you can find the best post-race parties. In each category we've selected an overall winner, explained what makes the winner worthy, and also listed a number of "best of the rest" in each category. Whether you're looking to test the limits of your fitness on the hardest climbs in Europe or you're just looking to unwind with an easy swim, bike and run on a tropical island, you'll find your new favorite race here.

10 HARDEST RACES ON EARTH

Picking the hardest race on Earth was a little tricky. Of course, a full iron-distance has to be tougher than a 70.3 race, but we wanted our winner to have the toughest, not necessarily the longest, course. With that in mind it was hard to pick anything other than Maryland's Savageman Triathlon.

Savageman Triathlon

Location: Deep Creek Lake State Park, Md.

2010 Date: Sept. 19

Distance: 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike, 13.1-mile run

Website: Savagemantri.org

★ **Editor's Choice**

Altriman

Location: Les Angles, France

2010 Date: July 10

NOT JUST ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

Kyle Yost was tired of boring, flat triathlon courses, so he created his own. Now in its third year, the Savageman Triathlon has grown to be one of the most popular half-iron distance races on the planet. Why so popular? Two words: It's hard.

BY JAY PRASUHN

The Eastern Continental Divide, which rises from the southernmost tip of Florida up into eastern Canada, climbs to 2,982 feet and there looks out over an expanse of rolling hills that descend into deep valleys. The oak, maple, hickory and sweet gum that blanket the ridgeline make the area in fall look like a rolling sea on fire in beautiful oranges and reds. Historically, the divide represented the boundary between British and French colonial possessions in North America before 1760.

Not quite 250 years later, in early fall of 2009, at the upper passage through western Maryland, the Eastern Continental Divide was the burial ground for many, many four-letter words (none of which can be printed here). Turning my pedals while focusing on balance and steady power (both of which I was

lacking), I launched a tirade here in August near the crest of the divide at Mile 23 of the Savageman Triathlon, a 3-year-old half-iron distance race. And at this point in my race, I was pissed. I did all the right things in gearing my bike with an 11-28 cassette to ascend the 31-percent grade Westernport Wall. But the hills after it were beating me down like a rented mule. "Forget the half-marathon to come," I thought. "I just want this ride to be done—and to get a brick."

Brick? I'll get to that. Back on the bike course, though, others were also going ballistic. Profanity could be heard throughout the bike from breathless athletes passing and being passed while moving at 6 mph. Behind me, a small woman, who I thought could have been a nun, was spouting some very non-nun-becoming words. Souls were audibly cracking.

Dhabi and the surrounding desert on a closed course.

The 124-mile bike course passes many of the emirate's most extravagant structures, including the Sheikh Zayed Mosque and the Yas Marina Formula One circuit (yes, athletes will actually do a lap of the 5K F1 course). The 20K run course sticks to the city proper, treating runners to views of the Arabian Gulf the whole way.

The extra-long bike course coupled with an extra-short run gives athletes an opportunity to race a long-course event early in the season without taxing their legs too much for their other big events later in the year. The curious distance will certainly be a hit with Team Abu Dhabi captain Faris Al-Sultan, who won the 2005 Ironman World Championship thanks in large part to his strength on the bike. Other pros rumored to be interested in taking a shot at a slice of the \$250,000 purse include American Chris Lieto, Germany's Normann Stadler and British super-biker Phil Graves.

While the ADTA and IMG are focused on bringing some of the best athletes in the world to the inaugural event (don't be surprised to see Chrissie Wellington toeing the start line), neither party has forgotten about the age-group competitors. The Abu Dhabi International Triathlon will be one of the few tris in the world to offer a legitimate amateur prize purse. A total of \$20,000 will go to the age-group champions, \$1,000 for each age-group winner. Age-groupers will also have the option of doing half the course (1.5K, 100K, 10K) and can also compete in the short-course race as a relay.

To register, visit Abudhabitriathlon.com.



American TTT North Carolina

Location: White Lake, N.C.

2010 Date: Oct. 8-10

Distance:

- Super sprint: 250m swim, 7-mile bike, 1-mile run
- Olympic: 1500m swim, 40K bike, 10K run
- Half-iron: 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike, 13.1-mile run

Website: Hfpracing.com

Subaru Banff International Triathlon

Location: Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada

2010 Date: Sept. 11

Distance:

- Olympic: 1.5K swim, 40K bike, 10K run
- Sprint: 500m swim, 13K bike, 5K run

Website: Triseries.ca/banff

Leon's World's Fastest Triathlon

Location: Gary, Ind.

2010 Date: June 6

Distance: 1.5K swim, 40K bike, 10K run

Website: Leonstriathlon.com

Ironman 70.3 Miami

Location: Miami

2010 Date: Oct. 30

Distance: 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike, 13.1-mile run

Website: Ironmanmiami.com

10 GREENEST RACES

A decade ago triathlon was certainly not at the forefront of putting on carbon-neutral events. That's changed considerably over the last 10 years, thanks in large part to people like Barry Siff of 5430 Sports in Boulder, Colo., who has won numerous awards for putting on sustainable, local events. While we give the entire Boulder Triathlon Series high marks for going green, our greenest race award goes to perhaps the country's greenest city: Portland, Ore. As it does with many things, the city takes triathlon to new levels of greenness. The finish line is made of local flowers; the race shirts are made from bamboo and moisture-wicking charcoal. Perhaps coolest of all, body marking is done by the Portland Society for Calligraphy with non-toxic markers. It's a number you won't want to wash off. So, if you're down with bamboo bike racks, a naturopathic medical tent and locally sourced aid station supplies, head to Portland for the greenest race of your life.

Freshwater Trust Portland Triathlon

Location: Portland, Ore.

2010 Date: Aug. 22

Distance: 1.5K swim, 40K bike, 10K run

Website: Portlandtri.com

★ Editor's Choice

Boulder Peak Triathlon

Location: Boulder, Colo.

2010 Date: July 11

Distance: 1.5K swim, 42K bike, 10K run

Website: Bouldertriserries.com/peak

Marin County Triathlon

Location: San Rafael, Calif.

2010 Date: Oct. 31

Distance: 1.5K swim, 22-mile bike, 10K run

Website: Marintriathlon.com

Ironman 70.3 Vineman

Location: Sonoma County, Calif.

2010 Date: July 18

Distance: 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike, 13.1-mile run

Website: Vineman.com



Photos courtesy Freshwater Trust, Portland Triathlon