



## ADVENTURE RACING TIPS FOR THE NEWBIE By Robyn Benincosa

Okay, you know darn well you've been wanting to try "that crazy adventure racing stuff" for a while now. Well, this is your quit-being-afraid-and-get-out-there official quick-start guide! Words of advice before we start: RUN! NOW! Before it's too late! Adventure racing is the most addictive sport you'll ever try, and once you get sucked in, there's no going back. So you may as well sell your aerobars, clear out your garage to make space for scads of new gear, cut back on your hours at work, give away your Speedo, invest in some duct tape and call all your closest pals. You're about to enter a world where anything and everything is possible.

On top of that, you'll learn way more than you ever wanted to know about yourself and your teammates — for better and for worse. And you may never want to come back. Still in? Do I hear a "heck yeah?" Okay, let's do it! But when you find yourself eventually standing at the start of the Primal Quest or the Raid Gauloises questioning your sanity, don't say I didn't warn you.

So here's an overview of the sports involved, a brief training plan for each and some handy tips that we old-timers had to learn the hard way.

### HIKING/RUNNING/SCRAMBLING

Many of your races will start out with a run that turns into a hike or scramble, so you'd better be ready on all counts. Hiking and running muscles are very different, so you need to train both. Also, practicing scrambling (on as many different types of terrain as you can find, including wet, slippery stuff) is the key to gaining that competitive advantage on the roadies.

**Training.** For a race of 12 hours or less, you should follow a half-marathon training plan but do most of your runs on trails. For a race of more than 12 hours, you should follow a full-marathon training plan and use the same guidelines.

Do hill repeats (i.e. four to six sets of 80 percent effort on a hill that takes three to four minutes to run) and interval training (two-three-four-five

minutes "on" with an equal amount of rest in the "off" phase) twice per week in the final month of training leading up to the race.

**Tips.** Race and train in trail running shoes (not road shoes). They provide better grip and more stability and you'll have fewer stone bruises and fewer blisters.

Practice running/hiking with a 10-15 pound pack several times before your race, both for the strength benefits and the knowledge of your equipment (i.e. how are you going to get to your water? Food? Where is the most efficient place to store required gear for easy access? Does the pack grate you like cheese on your neck, back, arms?)

Wear thin Coolmax socks to prevent blisters (two pairs if it's cold) and take all of the calluses off of your feet before a race. Calluses can cause deep blisters, which are very painful. Also, wear short gaiters to keep "crap" out of your shoes.

### PADDLING

Becoming a good paddler is the fastest way to gain a competitive advantage in adventure racing, since it's the weak link for most of the teams that cross over from triathlon. It's very easy to gain a 10-15 minute lead in an average two-hour paddle if you're good — a feat that's almost impossible to accomplish on mountain biking and running legs.

Paddling sections can be anything from a nice flat-water cruise on a lake to class 4 whitewater and six-foot ocean swells, so get out there and practice in as many conditions as you can find. Just remember to always take a buddy with you.

**Training.** First, contact a good paddler to learn stroke technique and water safety (especially how to get your booty out of and back into the dang boat when your world turns upside down).

A good rule of thumb for stroke technique is to paddle with your arms locked completely straight throughout the entire stroke. This forces you to use your torso and midsection for power (via the

back and forth twisting and untwisting of your body, much like a washing machine rotor) versus relying on your manly arms (which will be limp, lifeless and useless within 30 minutes).

Paddle with a group whenever possible. The best case scenario would be to find a K-1 training club (flatwater olympic kayaks) or ocean racing team. Join an outrigger canoe club to supplement your kayaking and help with your strength.

Do at least one long paddle (one-and-a-half-plus hours) and a session of interval training per week (similar to intervals you'd do for running).

**Tips.** Always focus on technique versus turnover (number of strokes per minute) for increased speed. Similar to swimming, the better your technique, the fewer number of strokes you have to take to get across the pool/lake. That efficiency pays huge benefits over the long haul.

It's very difficult to eat while paddling, so rig the straw of your water/fluid pack to a wire coat hanger that you can adjust to sit just below your lips for hands-free refueling. Fill the bladder with CarboPro (my favorite way to add 500-1,000 tasteless calories to my water) and an electrolyte drink of choice and you'll never have to stop paddling.

Practice paddling/steering without a rudder on your boat. Many races will supply boats that have no rudder, and you will gain a huge advantage with your ability to steer through the other teams which are going in frustrated zig zags and circles.

Put a pad on your seat (duct tape it down) if you have access to your boat prior to the race. You'll be higher (more power but slightly tipper) and your butt will thank you.

### NAVIGATION

About 80-90 percent of races will have some kind of navigation or orienteering component. It's a bit intimidating at first, but once you start learning and have some successes, this is an aspect of the race that you will truly learn to love.

Good navigating provides an incredible com-