

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA100 - Laura Hedges

Saturday 14th May 2016, 5am. I step out of bed, look at my race gear laid out on the floor and think to myself "It's here. Today is finally here". Today is the day that the months of training have been leading to. Today I will be pushed further than I've ever been pushed before. Today I will experience the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Today I will complete my first 100km Ultra Marathon. I will remember today forever. Feeling sick with nerves I force down breakfast before checking my race pack for the hundredth time. I pull on my runners and decide to change my socks. I don't know why but I did. Will I regret this later?

The weather is perfect with clear blue sky and fresh mountain air and the atmosphere is electric. I can feel the nerves and excitement of everyone around me. A guy gives a nervous smile and I can hear his thoughts... "This is it. No turning back now." I look down at my shuffling feet thinking "I shouldn't have changed my socks." I run across the start line saying "see you tomorrow finish line!" I'm aiming for an 18 hour finish... I give a nervous chuckle at the thought of this and just how crazy it still sounds. 18 hours of non-stop muscle burning endurance ahead of me... bring it on!

I'm feeling great through the first checkpoints until I hit Iron Pot Ridge. Wow! The climb looks vertical from where I'm standing. I scramble up to the top to hear the sound of the didgeridoo and witness the most stunning views across the valley. Can I just sit down for a bit and enjoy this? If only! CP3 awaits with my support crew, refreshments and much needed encouragement. I leave here just 10 minutes behind my anticipated time.

Heading along Six Foot I see the 50km sign. I fist pump to celebrate the half way. I'm 8 hrs 45 mins in and happy with the time. Nellies Glen next which is gruelling and eats into my time. I make it to the top and run into CP4, 57kms. I head back out into the darkness, just over 40kms left. I'd forgotten how many steps are ahead of me but keep going, one foot in front of the other. I say to myself, deliriously, as I turn a corner, "Of course. More steps" and let out a sarcastic laugh! I eventually approach the lights and music of CP5, 78kms, feeling ok but my knees have taken the impact of the course. The downhill of Kedumba is painful and slows me to a walk. I realise that 18 hrs is out of reach but I have time, hills & the Furber Steps ahead of me to be ok with this!

I hit the final boardwalk hearing a guy saying my name and cheering from the amazing remaining supporters. "Is she going to run it in?"... you're damn right I am! I run across the finish line in 21 hrs 15 mins. Exhausted and elated, I cry as my friend hugs me. I've just completed the UTA100. Nobody can ever take this away from me. I get home and kick off my runners and socks. To my amazement I have no blisters. Only now am I very glad I changed my socks... my miracle socks!

This UTA experience, from training right through to race day, has been life changing for me. If you're thinking about entering this event then do it now! Don't think about it anymore. It will be a long journey of committed training but every second you put in will be worth it when you cross that finish line, trust me. With discipline, dedication & determination you will achieve your goals.

So what's next for me? UTA100 2017... sub 18 hrs needs to be achieved :)