

ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA100 – Matt Dunshea

This was my first UTA/TNF event and my first 100 kilometre race. Since November last year, I'd undertaken personal running training geared specifically to this event. The training had been a massive step-up from the running "training" that I'd been doing on my own previously.

Prior to race day, training, diet, weight – everything – had been script perfect. By the time my wave (Wave 2) was released onto the course, I didn't feel underdone or under-prepared in any way.

Being my first 100 kilometre event, I was under strict instructions that my first goal should be (simply) to finish. All other goals, especially time goals, were secondary concerns. However, to help organise my crew, I needed a gauge for expected times at each CP. As a result, my "goal" time was approximately 14 hours.

Race start to CP1 proceeded without incident. I was following my nutrition/hydration plan to the letter. I was seeded in wave 2 with two other guys I've come to know over the last six months and are similar fitness level and ability to me. We settled into a good pace and the atmosphere was relaxed. I stepped up the pace slightly along Narrowneck and opted to descend Duncan's Pass rather than wait for the line to clear at Tarros Ladder. Everything to CP2 was still going well. My race plan meant the only requirement at CP2 was a water top-up.

Naturally, this was my first look at Ironpot Mountain. I'd heard plenty of war stories, but there's nothing quite like experiencing it yourself. The climb to the plateau is rugged, however, hearing the didgeridoo atop Ironpot is certainly a race highlight. Following the out and back section, the descent felt to be one of the fastest and more technical parts of the whole race. Once on to the flatter part of the Megalong road, it was time to consolidate after busting a gut up and down Ironpot. About now I was starting to wonder if I'd attacked Ironpot too eagerly. I decided to ease up the intensity for a few k's before CP3.

From a considerable distance away, I could hear the large crowd gathered at CP3. This was the first time to see my crew – for whom this was a new experience also. We were all novices together and that only added to the excitement of the day. Even though I was traveling well, it was still an incredible boost to see crew and feel the energy from everyone supporting the race. I was in and out within my goal time – five minutes.

The six foot track is familiar ground and running with two mates was helping to keep my mind off my rapidly fatiguing legs – especially my left quads. At 50km, cramping in quads and calves was starting to take hold. This made the climb up Nellies a more miserable experience than usual – taking approximately 45 minutes. Any thoughts of a sliver belt buckle were quickly forgotten and the focus now was purely how to finish. My running partners pressed on. Both went on to run an outstanding race.

I shuffled into CP4 wanting to do anything but proceed, but thankfully my crew kept things positive and made it clear that they were "in" no matter how long I was going to take. Everything now was about finishing and keeping the day as positive as possible. For people who've never crewed an ultra before, they were faultless and handled any setbacks perfectly. After a quick massage and nutrition re-supply, my mood improved and I decided to knuckle down and finish this thing, no matter what. Cramp, slow going and lots of support was the order of the day for the rest of the race.

Apart from completing the 100 kilometres, my biggest achievement was managing the course, my state of mind and my effort to finish. And finish I did – eventually – in 15h 48m.