

The Class of 2009

220 brings you plenty of World Champs and Ironman exploits, but what about those just off the sports radar? Sports journalist and triathlete **Roland Brown** hails four unsung heroes of '09...

Nick Holmes

Proving it's never too late to go long

It's quite an achievement to win the UK Double Iron at the age of 50, beating dozens of younger athletes and clocking the only time under 24 hours. What many people would regard as even more remarkable about Nick Holmes' triumph in August's Staffordshire-held race is a training routine that goes against conventional wisdom.

Tri coaches and other experts had better look away now because Nick, from Farnham in Surrey, has a back-to-basics approach whose wider adoption would put many of them out of a job. He doesn't log his training, let alone use a heart rate monitor. His Double Iron build-up included several 10km races – much shorter than commonly recommended. And his swim training included neither drills nor long sessions, just “ploughing up and down for an hour” three times a week.

This unconventional approach works for Nick, a computer programmer and father of three boys, who seems to be getting better as he gets older. In 2008 he finished second in his age group (third Brit overall) in Ironman France, running a 3:20hr marathon after the

mountainous bike leg. Nick's reason for the simple plan is easy to understand. “I find that a technical approach takes away from the enjoyment,” he says. “I just like to run or cycle. If I feel good I go harder; if not I take it easy. That goes against what I keep reading but, when you've been doing it as long as I have, the most important thing is to enjoy it.”

There's certainly method in what some might call madness, not least because Nick's approach has been honed by many years of training and competing, including nine Ironmans and more than 90 marathons. Those 10km races, for example, are local

“Nick has a back-to-basics approach to training. He doesn't log his training, nor use a heart rate monitor, and his swim training involves 'ploughing up and down for an hour' three times a week”

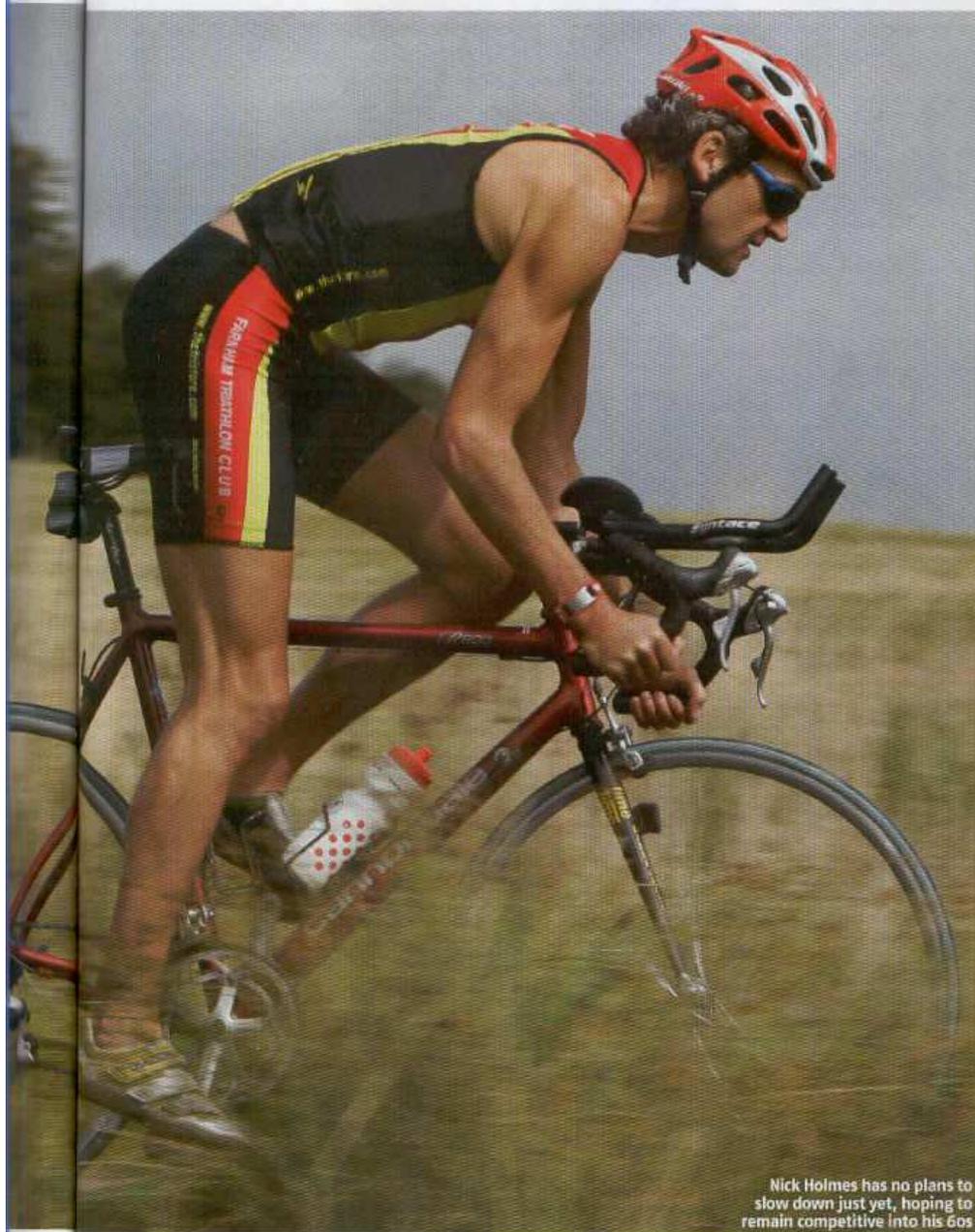
events that he makes into brick sessions by cycling there and back. “From experience I know my own body and what works for me,” he says. “I could probably tell you my heart rate without looking at anything.”

That triathlon experience began in 1985



when Nick and elder brother Adam entered the first Farnham Triathlon. Short races led to middle-distance, and eventually to the Ironman-distance Longest Day. “I loved it,” recalls Nick, “and found I was able to run a reasonably fast marathon after the 112-mile bike, which enabled me to be competitive.”

Despite numerous top-three finishes and age-group prizes, Nick had never won a race outright until that even longer day – all 23 hours, 48 minutes and 23 seconds of it. Not that he expected to win against a field including Darryl Carter, who'd recently gone



Nick Holmes has no plans to slow down just yet, hoping to remain competitive into his 60s

sub-nine hours at Roth. Carter led after the 4.8-mile, 304-length pool swim and set a fast pace on the bike, much of which took place in the dark. It was also raining heavily as Nick set off on his trusty 10-year-old Specialized, and even he admits to not enjoying all of the near 13-hour bike leg. "The novelty wore off after a few laps and it was just a case of ticking them off. By the last three laps my hands had gone numb from cold and vibration so I couldn't change gear. With all races you get low points. But part of being an endurance athlete is getting through them because you know they will finish."

At least the 16-lap bike course (on which he averaged 17.29mph) allowed wife Sue to provide regular essentials, including spaghetti plus a change out of sodden clothes

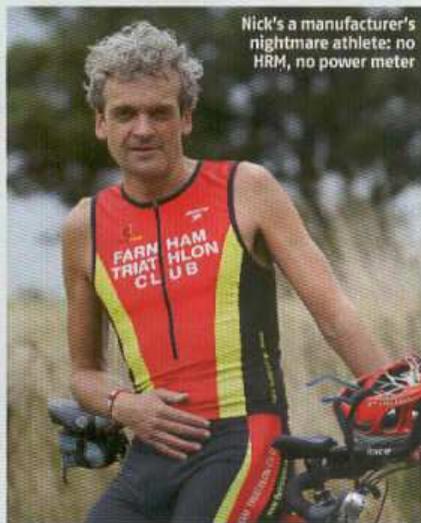
at half distance. At the finish Nick strapped on a head torch and set off on the run in second place, taking the lead soon afterwards when the ailing Carter dropped out.

The 52-mile run took almost eight-and-a-half mostly painful hours, but eventually he was high-fiving his way over the line. "When you go long you're just doing what you can do on the day, and if that gets you into a good position that's a bonus. But winning was an experience I'll never forget."

Ambitions? "To keep going, keep enjoying it and not slow down too much. Having been to Kona [in 1989] my only ambition would be to podium there, but I'm not fast enough now. Maybe I'll wait another 10 years and see if I'm competitive as a 60-year-old." The way he's going, you wouldn't bet against it.

Typical training week

Monday	Rest
Tuesday	AM Swim, 30mins (1,600m lengths). Gym, 30mins (core stability, weights, stretching). Bike, 30mins spinning in gym
Wednesday	AM Swim, 30-60mins (1.6-3.8km)
Thursday	AM Swim, 30mins (1,600m). Gym, 30 mins (core stability, weights, stretching). Bike, 30mins spinning in gym PM Run, 1hr (~8 miles) with Fleet and Crookham AC or solo
Friday	AM Run, 1hr (~8miles)
Saturday	AM Bike, 3-5hrs, Farnham Tri Club or solo
Sunday	AM Run, 2hrs (15-17 miles) or race (tri or run, 10km-marathon). Shorter races combined with cycle to and from venue for brick session
Total hours approx	12-14



Nick's a manufacturer's nightmare athlete: no HRM, no power meter

Nutrition for Double Iron UK (1pm start)

Pre race 8am, hotel breakfast: Alpen and tinned fruit. During morning, dipped into pasta tub - plain spaghetti, olive oil, ketchup, Marmite - and sipped energy drink.

Swim Fluid only: no specific plans regarding fuelling. Just drank when thirsty and it was convenient to stop. 500ml electrolyte (Nuun), 500ml energy (Maximuscle Viper).

Bike Fluid: 3 bottles (2,250ml) electrolyte (Dioralyte), 3 bottles (2,250ml) energy. 1 bottle (500ml) tea at half-way. Solids: 6 Nutrigrain soft bars, 2 plain flapjack bars, 3 Viper Extreme bars, 1.5 250g bags Fruit Pastilles. Big dip into pasta tub at half-way.

Bike to run A few handfuls of salty pretzels.

Run Fluid: 3 bottles electrolyte, 2 bottles energy, 1 bottle water. Solids: 1 Viper Extreme bar, quick dip into pasta tub at half-way.