

 Age-Grouper Tale

EARTH, WIND AND MIRE

Horse breeder and mother of five **Lucy Saxelby** now knows why the Nottingham Dirty Dash off-road duathlon is so-named. Here she shares her many spills and thrills...

WORDS LUCY SAXELBY IMAGES ONE STEP BEYOND

MEET LUCY SAXELBY



AGE » 38 **PROFESSION** » Horse breeder and mum of five **WHY I RACED** » To improve my fitness and escape cooking Sunday lunch **BEST RESULTS TO DATE** » 3rd, 2015 Euro AG Du Champs; 7th, 2015 Outlaw & IM Wales

It's 6am. As wind and rain batter my kitchen window, I down a coffee and a bowl of porridge before heading out on the 50min drive to Holme Pierrepont near Nottingham for the Dirty Dash off-road duathlon.

STORMY CONDITIONS

I register, rack my bike and chat with some of my favourite triathlon people – mainly about the Arctic weather. Clubmate Jim Parker and local physio Gary Benson reliably inform me that the start gantry and the timing tent have blown away in the gales.

I finish my sports drink and eat a Clif Shot Bloks bar and set off mid-pack next to fellow Lincoln Tri members George Hackney and John Crowder, the latter immediately impressing with a springbok-like leap over the first puddle as he mutters something about keeping his feet dry for as long as possible. The first run is two windy

laps of 2.5km, taking in a couple of hills and a steep, slippery descent.

I puff into T1 feeling the run has gone well (thanks coach Clint Sawyer and your Friday night lamp post sessions). I'm pleased to leave the painful run behind to have fun on my bike – or, rather, as I've broken my Specialized, my husband Jon's 18-year-old Rock Lobster, which refuses to budge out of the middle chainring for me despite working perfectly for him (oh well, single chainrings are the latest thing, I'm told).

THERE WILL BE MUD

The bike course is 2 x 8km laps of tarmac, grass and mud with some cyclo-cross-style technical turns and hills. I was told this race was more technical than Clumber Park or Sherwood Pines, the other races in the Midlands Off-Road Series, but the first few kilometres are fast on good surfaces. I wonder what all the fuss is about when I turn a corner and am met by a scene I can only describe as the duathlon equivalent of the aftermath of the French charge at Agincourt. Men wallow and flail in the mud, desperation on their faces, limbs thrashing in search of firmer ground as their fallen steeds sink slowly into the quagmire. I attack the mud myself, showing the guys how to do it. I fall off twice.

On the second lap, I overtake a few men on the tarmac stretches and approach the battlefield again, avoiding another pile of fallen soldiers by venturing into some long grass. I'm congratulating myself on my expert choice of lines when I topple into a miniature swamp hidden by the grass. Some kind gents, who have sensibly dismounted for this section, pull me to my feet. I shout a hasty 'thank you', remount and put the power down, only to propel myself sideways back into the bog. I drag myself out and gain a few places as I pass my rescuers, who are doubled over laughing. Did I say they were gents?

The rest of the bike is less eventful but, as men on cyclo-cross bikes cut through the mud, I make a mental note to put a cross bike on my Christmas list.

On the final run, I cross the finish line in 1:42hrs and happily discover that I've won my age-group for the race and for the series. I'm less happy to find two worms in my derailleur when I put my bike into our new car but I'd still highly recommend this superbly-organised series, and off-road duathlon in general.

In 2016, I plan to do age-group races in Germany and Denmark plus a couple of middle distances, including the new Outlaw Half at Holkham Hall, North Norfolk in July. ■ 220