

Report on the IAU 100km World Cup 2008

The Australian Team selected for the IAU World Cup held in Tarquinia Italy on 8 November 2008 was the largest selected in recent memory with 6 men and 4 women making up the team. Together with Manager Nick Drayton, and a support cast of 5, it was with much anticipation that the team collected over the week leading up to the race. The location of the team Hotel left a little to be desired, but Ultra Runners are never short on desire and it would have to be said that it played a role in bringing the team together in such a short period of time. We all got to appreciate the Italian way and mastered the ordering of coffees in our best Italian. Dave Eadie also did his best to market Australian Ultra running as the official team spokesman on the IAAF internet TV program featuring the event.

The race began from the town of Tuscania situated about 2 hours north-west of Rome and commenced with a short circuit of the cobble stoned streets of the historical town, before heading out on a 24km undulating stretch of road towards Tarquinia. The rolling hills in this section meant everyone had to work harder than would normally be the case as these races are often held on pancake flat courses. At the 24km mark there followed a 1km descent that provided opportunity and danger from the temptation to push downhill too hard and do damage to the legs with 75% of the course still to run. The following 13kms were flat and led the runners onto a 14km circuit on the outskirts of Tarquinia that included 2 rises of substance, some general undulating and some basically flat sections.

It was on the circuit that 3 refreshment stations were established, and with 6 crew, we were able to have all 3 set up and managed. The runners missed out on the fun and games at the drink stations with some colourful exchanges between some of our more outspoken crew, and the local officials. We were fortunate to have such outstanding crew on each of these stations to protect our supplies and provide smiling support at regular intervals. After 4 laps of this circuit, the race finished with a rising section back into town, before finishing with a steep climb back to the gates of the Old walled town perched on the top of the hill. By the time most runners were finishing, the course was lined with candles that led the runners around the loop and then guided them up the hill to a quite spectacular finish.

The men's team went in with high expectations. Magnus Michelsson had been selected in 2006 but had to withdraw with injury so we all looked forward to seeing what he could do after his recent efforts at Comrades. Magnus ran as he always does, and ran with the leaders through the Marathon point only to suffer from cramps that halted his progress. This left Darren Benson as the front running Australian only to be struck down by an asthma attack that had the official medicos reaching for the hook and ending his race. Dean Cook meanwhile continued to motor along as the front running Australian in a typically tough performance, and he ended up crossing the line just minutes ahead of myself, but he was never going to give up that place. Dean and myself both had solid races under the conditions. Tim Cochrane was next across the line in just over 8 hours after another gutsy run riddled early on with stomach problems, but as he has often done in recent years, he took stock, kept himself going, and saw the race through in another solid effort. Dave Eadie meanwhile had a tough day but in no surprise to anyone who knows him, he accepted his fate, kept his spirits up and continued on. In a great example of teamwork he picked up the cramp ridden Magnus and committed to take him through to the finish. A lap out, Magnus, although naturally appreciative of Dave's support, felt he needed a break from the verbal barrage, and moved away to be the next Emu across the line followed in by Dave. There are plenty of runners of the class of Magnus who walk away when things don't go their way, but Magnus saw this through and in doing so showed great respect to his team mates and the national colours; respect which is reciprocated by all of us. Overall the team finished 9th which was disappointing based on our own expectations, but

we did well to get a team finish when plenty, such as the USA did not as runners fell to some carnage out on the course.

It was great to have a woman's team back this year, and they did us proud. Kerrie Bremner led the women home in a PB just over the elusive 9hr mark. Not too far behind was the impeccably paced Susannah Harvey-Jamieson who also ran a personal best. Magnus actually caught up to Susannah as she reached the final rise to the finish, and in a sign of the times that provided much material for post race discussions, raced away to the finish. Being a great team player, Susannah strongly defended Magnus' decision in the face of a barrage from the team spokesman! The next female was Vivienne Kartsounis who was out to get some redemption for the race 12 months earlier and she did that, finishing strongly and showing what she is still capable of. The 3rd Rookie in the woman's team was Sharon Callister who ran a really consistent well paced race to be the 4th of the Australian Women to cross the line. That gave the women a 100% finish rate and overall position of 8th.

In review, the times were generally down on those hoped for by the individual runners, but the effort and commitment of every one of the team can never be questioned. The 100km Championship races are very intense, and with the added burden of extensive travel to Europe in most years the challenge is great. The runners all work regular jobs and many cases support families, and to achieve what they have achieved in being selected to represent Australia and performing as they have is something about which each and every one can be incredibly proud. It was an honour to Captain the Emus of 2008.

The Team would particularly like to thank the following people and businesses for their support. Thanks to our Manager Nick Drayton, who took the administration tasks and challenges in his stride. The traveling support crews of James, Euan, Stuart (Coley), Shannon and Echo, you were all fantastic. Dave Eadie who commenced negotiations with 2XU and they assisted with discounted outfits for the team and hopefully this may be the start of a long term association between 2XU and AURA.

The following group of supporters provided financial assistance towards the team, including funding all of the outfits. These supporters have nothing to gain directly from an involvement with AURA and Ultra Running, but did so to support a National Team. So a special thank you to Marsdens Law Group, Crispin & Jeffery Chartered Accountants, Warren Moore, Paul Umbrazunas, Peter Roach, Robert Sennitt and Darren Rogerson; and finally the group behind the naming of the Emus, and the biggest financial supporter, being all the participants in the Kudos Cup (Comprising – This years Champion, The Litho, Wazza, Tiger, Lord Ted, Fatty, Hands, LB3, Pant, Gloves, Tunksy, Eka, Rogue, Qwerty, Kiwi, Sherwo, Degs, Coley, LB2, Huntsman, Toppo, Boof, LB1, LB5, Bones, Block, Dawso, Soft Hands, Buss, Arko, Toughest, Old Mate, LB6, Sherwoj, and this year's wooden spooner, LB4)

Finally thank you to AURA, without which Australia would not be sending teams to any of the IAU events, and all AURA members for the support you give the sport in this country.

Jo Blake – Team Captain