

## THE STORY OF THE LANGEBAAN BREEZATHON By GEORGES WILLIS

As is often the case with events of this nature, the seeds for the Langebaan Breezathon were planted over a few beers. The occasion was my 41st birthday and the merits of running, cycling and paddling were being debated by Rob Meintjes, Mark Torrington and myself. As the consumption of beers increased, so did the number and extent of the challenges issued. The only thing that was agreed upon was that we should initiate some sort of race, and that the race should be based in Langebaan. It was also decided that the inaugural event should take place before the end of that year (2001). With my birthday being on 16 November, there was not a huge amount of time to organise the event.

In the cold light of day, without the help of alcohol to fire the imagination, it became apparent that there were a number of issues that needed to be attended to before such an event could become a reality. Amongst the decisions and organisational considerations that would have to be dealt with were the following:

- A suitable route for the three disciplines of the event: paddling, running and cycling would have to be identified;
- What would be the sequence of the three legs comprising the race, and what would serve as the transition area;
- What would the distance of each leg be;
- The race would have to be given a name;
- Prizes would have to be identified for the various categories, and the prizes would have to be sourced;
- The race would have to have a set of rules;
- The race would have to be financed by way of entry fees and possible sponsorships;
- Competitors would have to be provided with adequate refreshments during the event;
- Equipment would have to be sourced as very few potential entrants had boats and others did not possess bicycles;
- Would any permission have to be obtained from authorities such as the National Parks Board or Traffic Authorities;
- Where were the competitors for the first race going to come from;
- Should the race be open to individuals only, or should teams be allowed;
- The race would have to have officials of some sort e.g. timekeepers, a starter, marshalls, etc.

Taking a cue from then current swim triathlons, it was decided that the order of the race should be paddling followed by cycling, with the running being the last leg. Next we had a look at Langebaan lagoon where the paddle leg would have to take place. Standing on the beach, it soon became obvious that the paddle would have to be around Schaapen Island, a distance of approximately 3km. The only worry here would be wind and swell - we obviously did not want to expose the competitors to any danger. Furthermore, it was decided that a safety boat would have to be employed and the race would have to start early enough to limit the possibility of unfavourable conditions. The start time was set at 7.00 am, which would also give competitors coming up from Cape Town, enough time to get to the start. The choice of paddling leg has in retrospect been an excellent one, as competitors are treated to the true beauty of Langebaan lagoon with its splendid and varied bird life. This is assuming one has enough energy to enjoy the view, and is comfortable enough on their chosen vessel to avoid the odd swim or two. Care must also be taken to avoid submerged rocks if paddling too close to the Island in an effort to save precious time.

As regards the cycle leg, it became apparent that the road out to Iscor and back, via Mykonos was the only suitable one. The reasons for choosing this route were the distance (23km) which was similar to the swim triathlons referred to above, the route was easy to follow with few possibilities of competitors getting lost, it had a natural turning point at Iscor and it was reasonably flat (we were not very fit in those days). The negative with the route, is that if the South-Easter is blowing as was the case in the 2004 race, it is an extremely difficult ride on the return route.

All that was now needed was a run route which need to be 5km in keeping with the swim triathlon format. The route we have, was designed and measured by Rob Meintjes and his wife Cajsja. They came up with a truly inspiring and for some difficult route. The route begins and ends with a short stretch along Langebaan Beach past the landmark Pearly's Restaurant, and also takes in a stretch of gravel road past the Yacht Club. This stretch of the race, whilst being taxing, has panoramic views of the Lagoon and once you have turned to head home, any South-Easter will be at your back whilst you take in the beauty of the West Coast.

The obvious starting point, was 3 Smith Street, which dovetailed nicely with the start and finish points of each leg. The house happened to be owned by my father, David Willis and Mel Richter. We managed to convince them that the nice grass area in front of the house would serve as a fantastic transition area and would not be unduly damaged during the race. They not only agreed to host the race, but also each contributed R200 sponsorship and entered the race as part of a team.

It had become clear that some fundraising was to be needed to pay for equipment, prizes, T-shirts, refreshments and the like. I started to knock on the door of some of my clients, and got cash sponsorships from Derby Cars, Colins Landscaping and Gardening and Amdec Investments. The businesses of some of the competitors also made contributions, namely Comtellco, Van de Ghinste Exports and Ivan van Niekerk Construction. Dennis Meintjes also matched his friends, Dave Willis and Mel Richter, and contributed R200. He was also commissioned to handcraft the magnificent Breezathon Shield which would be awarded to the first individual to complete the race. Langebaan Spar donated a case of Cokes as refreshments.

With our generous sponsorships and entry fees set at R70 and R35 for individuals and team members respectively we were able to hire some of the necessary equipment from the Windsurf Centre in Langebaan, the balance of the equipment was begged and borrowed. Trophies for the various categories, together with miniature personalised trophies for each competitor were ordered from Toker Brothers.

The issues of marshalls, timekeepers and other race officials was solved by persuading less fit family members and local Langebaan residents to give of their time, for which they were promised a T-shirt and boerewors roll after the event. It was also decided not to seek any permission from any of the local authorities, but rather to keep the event low key and hopefully fly under their radars. A few years later, I would be hauled before the Parks Board to explain our paddling activities and was fined R100. The positive of this encounter with authority, is that we now formally apply for and are granted permission to hold the paddling leg. As far as the other two legs are concerned, we are still silent and have to date not had any interference from the powers that be.

We now had most aspects of the race covered, but had not yet considered who might actually take part in this new event outside of the few people that had initially proposed the race and a few other friends. It was then that it was decided to open the race to teams as well as individuals. This allowed for the entry of competitors who would not have been able to complete the entire event on their own. With a certain amount of persuasion and bribery amongst family, friends and a few of the locals, we managed to assemble an inaugural field of 27 competitors.

As regards the question of race rules, I scoured a number of entry forms from various races and took what I considered to be those appropriate to our event, and drew up a set of race rules. A few rules were tweaked and others added that were peculiar to the nature of our race. All we now needed was a name for the race. At the time my favourite alcoholic beverage was a Bacardi Breezer and bearing in mind that Langebaan was notorious for its wind, the race was given the name of The Langebaan Breezathon.

We were now set to race and on the morning of 23 December 2001, 27 intrepid "athletes" lined up to face the starter, my grandmother, Georgette Burreddu. She rang the start bell, which is still used today, and the field headed down Smith Street on to the beach and towards their boats ..... the rest is history.