



IRON IN HIS SOUL

MUSICIAN JEFF MARTIN USED TO LIVE THE HIGH LIFE BUT NOWADAYS THE SONGWRITER PREFERS TO GET UP EARLY TO TRAIN HARD FOR THE NEXT IRONMAN. BY TANYA SWEENEY

Picture in your mind's eye an Irish indie musician, and there's a very good chance you've conjured up an image of somebody bouncing from bar to pub to gig venue.

As a member of electro outfit Halfset, a touring musician with Adrian Crowley and as a singer-songwriter in his own right, Jeff Martin has done his fair share of all three. And while a touring musician and an Ironman-in-training may seemingly make for unusual bedfellows, Donnybrook-based Jeff somehow managed to reconcile the two selves.

In a world where most people happily take on one big project, Jeff certainly made his 2013 count, by heading to Frankfurt for his first Ironman event, and releasing a critically acclaimed album to boot.

In July, the musician — who also runs his own outdoor advertising company — took on his most gruelling physical challenge yet. Comprised of a 112-mile bike ride, a 2.6-mile swim and a 26.2-mile marathon, Ironman challenges are — putting it mildly — not for the faint of heart nor the weak of spirit.

Though he had been undertaking triathlons for four years, Jeff admits that as a youngster, he was the very opposite of fit and active, preferring to concentrate instead on music.

"I never did a tap," he admits. "I was the guy who'd drive to the local shop for milk. Even when I was young I was given detention for refusing to play rugby for my school. I had no interest in sports whatsoever."

Yet after years in the thick of things in Dublin's evergreen music community Jeff began to appraise things as he hit his 30s.

"I was tired of the same conversations in the same pubs with the same people," he notes. "And then with the advent of the two-day-hangover, due to hitting my 30s, it was time for a change. I started a bit of swimming, which I loved, then a bit of harmless running."

Before long, a friend issued a dare — to undertake a triathlon: a 750m swim, a 20k bike ride, and a 5k run. He rose to the challenge within weeks... yet the path to glory did not run smoothly.

"I knew so little about sports I thought I could cram for it like an exam but I was very wrong," he admits. "I did it and I loved it and did a respectable time with little training."

Bloodied but not unbowed, he joined the Pulse Triathlon Club (www.pulsetri.com) and found himself hooked.

Referring to Ireland's triathlon community, Jeff says: "It's really great and it's growing fast. Pulse is a really fantastic all-inclusive club. Everyone is so supportive and encouraging."

"Regardless of fitness level, everybody is treated the same and respected regardless of whether you are a newbie or a lifelong member who is winning races. They party hard too."

That said, Jeff gave up alcohol while training; no mean feat for an active musician in Dublin.

"Initially it was a bit strange," he recalls. "Friends wouldn't accept that I wasn't drinking any more. Eventually I had to drive when meeting them, so I could use the 'I'm driving' line."

"They gradually understood my new life but it took a bit of time. Midnight is the magic time to disappear — it seems to keep all concerned happy."

"Waking up naturally at 8am on Sunday morning and going for a long run was the payoff for me. If (a gig) does clash with training, you just get up earlier in the day and get it done. Failing that I did it very late at night, which I don't recommend."

As if completing an Ironman wasn't feat enough, Jeff's latest album (under the name Ghost Maps) was released mere weeks later... and topped many an end-of-year 'best of' list.

"2013 was a pretty full-on year for me," he reflects. "Running my own business, while training for an Ironman and also working on a new record; they are three completely different worlds, so I just had to be very disciplined with my time."

"It's the old cliché: if you want something done ask a busy person. Now that it is all over it has really made me think how many hours we all have in our week and what is, or might be, possible."

After completing a number of triathlons and Half-Ironman events down the years, the prospect of

going the whole hog and trying an Ironman began to loom large in Jeff's mind.

"Even when training for Olympic distance races (1,500m swim/40k bike/10k run) I swore that I would never do a full Ironman distance race but I was in awe of those that did it," he admits.

"The jump from Sprint to Olympic to Half-Ironman is doable but I felt the leap to double that again would be too much and more than I would be capable of. But I did the Galway Half-Ironman in 2012 (1,900m swim/90k bike/21.1k run) and really loved it and felt great during and after it. That was the same year as a load of my Pulse club mates did Frankfurt Ironman and I figured there's no reason I couldn't do a full Ironman (3.8k swim/180k bike/42.2k run) if I knuckled down to the training."

"It was

definitely about the sense of achievement and seeing how far I could push my body — racing against myself.”

Jeff describes his training in the run-up to Frankfurt as “fairly punishing”.

“I used a well known Ironman training plan — Don Fink’s ‘Be Iron Fit,’” he explains.

“It’s great and very simple to follow but I went for the hardest of all three plans on offer and in hindsight, I overtrained for the event, which can have a very negative effect

physically but more so psychologically. I was so devoted to training that I gave it 150pc and I didn’t listen to my body.

“I had no previous experience of that level of training, so I figured that being tired all the time was the norm but it shouldn’t be.”

Was he nervous ahead of the event? “Yes, very much so,” he says. “While I knew I could do the distance and that my two test races gave surprisingly good results, I was afraid that something outside my control would happen, like bad weather, cancelled swim, bike problems, nutrition or digestion.

“It’s a huge amount of training for just one event so everything is banking on that day. If it doesn’t go well, or you’re not on form, it’s not like you can go back the following weekend and fix it. It’s another 12 months away.”

Cometh the hour, and the Ironman experience itself is predictably one that will stay with him for a long time.

“I loved the swim, it was beautiful . . . so calm and relaxed,” he notes. “There was a point on the cycle route where I was climbing a hill and all the spectators were out drinking beers and they came close in to cheer the cyclists on.

“I gave a big roar and they all went crazy which was hilarious and I still laugh thinking about it. The worst (bit) was the run; the heat in Frankfurt killed me and I was dehydrated too. I got through it but it was significantly slower than I should have been.”

It was about the sense of achievement and seeing how far I could push myself

A mighty achievement, regardless: “There is a lot of hoo-ha made about crossing the finish line of an Ironman, that it’s the ‘greatest moment of your life’ and all that, but Ironman is a brand at the end of the day and it’s very ‘Americanised’ with the whole ‘You are an Ironman’ roar by the cemper as you cross the finish line,” he reflects.

“For me, Frankfurt Ironman was about my experience and my personal goal/target time based on the level of work I put into the training. My race didn’t go as planned on the day, so I guess I was a little underwhelmed by the time it came to crossing the line but that said, I did it and overall it was a great experience and the medal is amazing.”

Nowadays, and with the ultimate physical challenge under his belt, Jeff is happy for his current training regime to be simply ‘ticking over’ for now.

“I’m eying up a few races later in this year and might explore some longer-distance open-water swim events,” he reveals.

“I love swimming, the repetition and the rhythm — you can get into an almost trance-like state and can feel like you are cruising on autopilot. It takes the stress of the day away and makes me grateful for all that I have and the ability to peruse what I love.”

Ghost Maps’ album ‘The Ocean From The River’, can be streamed for free or bought at www.thisisghostmaps.bandcamp.com. For more information on Pulse Triathlon Club: www.pulsetri.com

