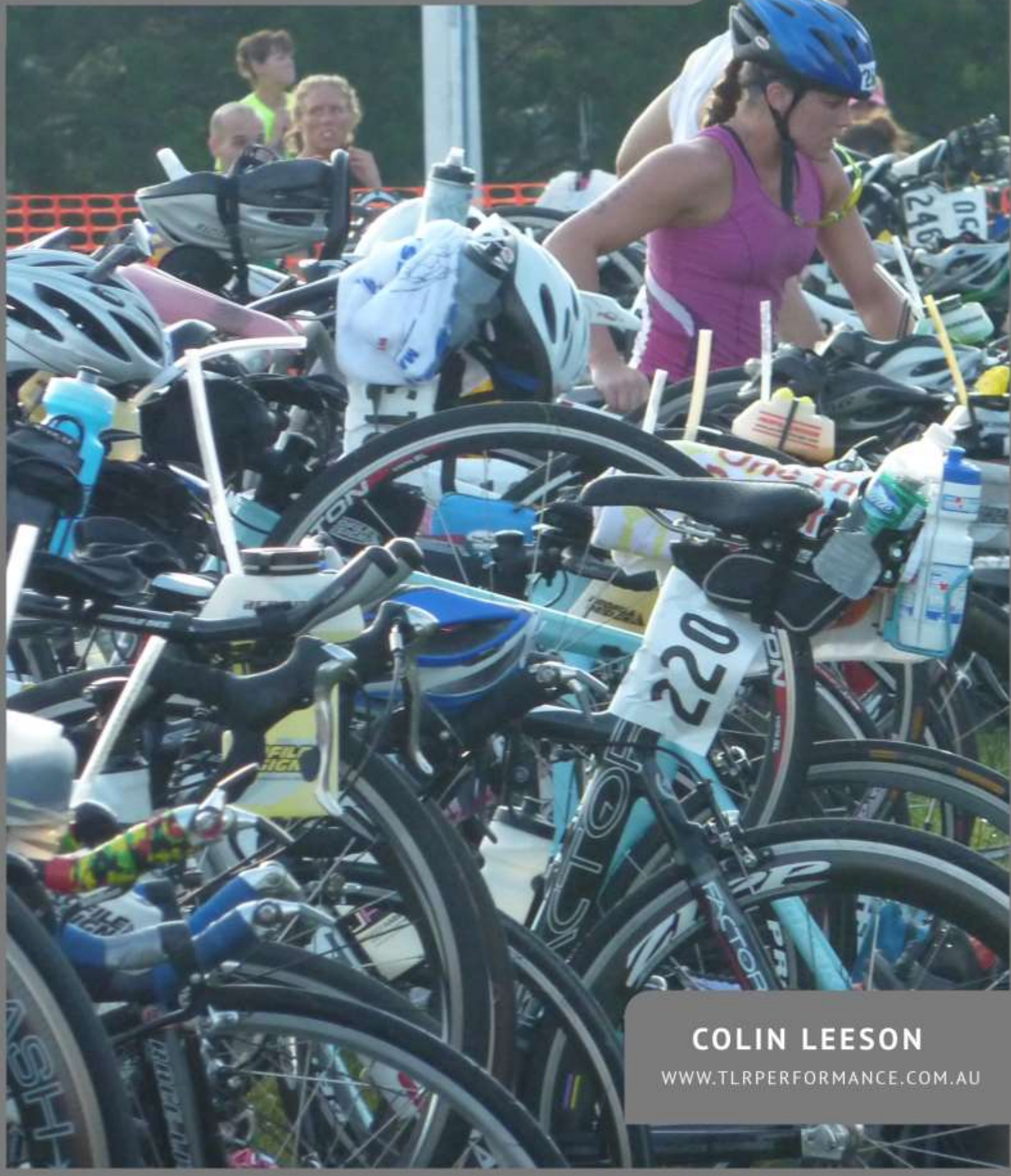


STARTING OUT IN TRIATHLONS

THE 4TH LEG



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About the Author

With 30 years' experience in cycling and triathlon, Colin Leeson is a leading authority in affordable, quality performance components for the cycling and triathlon industry.

Colin is the owner and manager of the brand **TLR Performance** which supplies a broad range of Cycling, Running and Triathlon products. He has a passion for sport and loves competing in triathlons and sharing his knowledge with others.

Introduction

Triathlon is a unique sport combining the three disciplines of Swimming, Cycling and Running. Triathlons come in a variety of sizes and difficulties ranging from introductory events for first timers, through the sprint distance events and up to the ultimate endurance event the "Ironman Triathlon".

Many people come to the sport of Triathlon having previously focused on one of the three sports. In my case this was both cycling and running where, as a teenager I was a very competitive runner and keen recreational cyclist. It wasn't until I was in my mid 20's that triathlons started to become more well-known and after being invited to come watch a friend at this Australian event called "Noosa Triathlon" I decided to form a team and have a go for myself. Well I went in the event and was immediately hooked and have been doing triathlons ever since.

Starting the TLR Performance brand gave me the fantastic opportunity to contribute to, and make a living out of a sport that I love.

In the "**Starting out in Triathlons**" series of eBooks I will share my experiences and take you through the basics of triathlon and cover topics which will help you understand how a triathlon event works, the equipment you will need including where best to spend your money, some of the Gotcha's you may come across, training programs and a multitude of tips.

I hope you get some real value from this series and hope to see you in a triathlon event somewhere, sometime.

Colin Leeson

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Cover: Transition area in a typical triathlon

The 4th Leg in a Triathlon – The Transition

The sport of triathlon has three official legs being the swim, the bike ride and the run. The “transition” is sometimes considered as the 4th leg of a triathlon as it too needs to be practiced and refined and it too can cause the race to be won or lost.

Developing and practicing a smooth and well planned transition strategy can make a significant difference to both the speed of your triathlon as well as how relaxed you will be on the day.

In this eBook we will focus on the triathlon transition and cover the following five points:

1. What is Transition
2. How does the transition area work
3. Your transition racking spot
4. Setting up your transition area
5. Post-race access to transition

What is the Triathlon Transition

The “Transition” in a triathlon is the process of changing, or transitioning, from one discipline to the next. This transition takes place in a compound named the “Transition Area” which is usually shortened by athletes to just “Transition”.

The transition area is a large fenced off area which is filled with long bike racks into which only athletes entered in the triathlon are permitted to enter. At the beginning of the event athletes take their bike and run gear into the transition area and set it up ready for the two visits they will make to the transition area during the race. These visits occur after the swim and after the bike ride.



The transition area has a number of entrances and exits which are used during the race. We will look at how these work in the next section.

How Does the Transition Area Work

The transition area is laid out in a manner that it is even for all athletes. This is achieved using chutes, entrances and exits to funnel athletes into and out of the transition area in a way that there is no advantage to any particular location.

Maps are provided for athletes so they understand how transition works and where they need to go at each point in the race.

This transition area map is from the Mooloolaba triathlon and Ironman 70.3 in QLD, Australia. It has a fairly standard layout with entrances and exits in opposite corners of the transition area.



If you follow the coloured lines on the map you can see the route you will take during the race. In this case after you finish an ocean swim you run along the road following the red dotted line and go through the “swim entry”. Next you make your way to your transition location (In the 2013 Ironman 70.3 my location was about where the red X is) You change to bike gear and run with your bike to the “Cycle exit” in the bottom right corner. You can see that this means all the athletes have virtually the same distance to cover regardless of where their rack location is. After the ride you again come back into transition at the bottom right corner, go back to your rack and change for the run then exit on the run at the top left corner. Once again this is even for all athletes.

This next map is from a Brisbane triathlon where access in and out of the transition area is only possible from one end. To make this event even for all competitors, chutes are used to funnel athletes to the far end of the transition area after both the swim and bike. This makes the moving distance equal regardless of the rack location.



In this map you can also follow the lines through transition:

- The Red line from the swim finish runs down the side of transition then back to your rack location then out onto the bike.
- The Purple line shows the end of the bike course, again going down the far end of transition before returning back to your rack location.
- The Orange line shows the exit to the run course

It is very important to check these maps and walk the route you will follow before the event. As I walk the route in transition I look for landmarks to help me find the way back to my bike. Usually this is something like “2nd row and run down to the 3rd light post”. There is nothing worse than being unable to find your bike amongst thousands of other bikes.

Being comfortable with transition flow gives you one less thing to be stressed about come race time and it lets you focus on what you are there to do... “Race”

Your Transition Rack Location

In most triathlons you are able to choose a location for your bike to be racked or “your transition area”. Usually the racks have a sign at the end with a number range which is usually related to your age group. As you look for a transition area position you will look for the rack number range that includes your number and find a location along this rack. We’ll look shortly at strategies for choosing a location like this.

Note. Some triathlons like the Ironman events have named transition locations so in these cases you go to a specific location with a sticker on the rack containing your name and number.

In the eBook “Starting out in Triathlons – The Ride” I spent some time talking about options for how to deal with cycle shoes for the bike leg. The method you chose for your cycle shoes helps make a decision on the location for your transition area.

This is the excerpt from that eBook:

“Choosing your location in transition has a lot to do with the method you choose to put your shoes on.

Transition areas are designed to be even for everybody so depending where you rack your bike you will either have a long run with your bike at the start of the ride or the end of the ride

i.e. closer to the ride exit = shorter run at the start,
 closer to the bike entrance = shorter run with the bike at the end of the ride

In my case, where I choose to put my cycle shoes on in transition at the start, and later to slip my feet out at the end of the ride, I want to be as close as possible to the ride exit to have the shortest run possible in my bike shoes. This leaves me with a longer run at the end but by then I am in bare feet which is easier to run. Getting a good position like this requires registering and getting into transition as early as possible.”

The last comment about getting in early is worth repeating. If you want to have a choice on your location you need to get in as early as you can or you will have to fit wherever is left over.

Note. In some events bike racking occurs the day before, some events have optional day before racking and some are only on the morning of the race.

Setting Up your Transition Area

Setting up your transition area is all about making your changeover to the next leg as smooth and quick as possible. How you position your items in this area can make a big difference to how effectively you go through transition. I have covered parts of transition area setup in other eBooks and will tie them all together here.

My biggest suggestion for overall transition area is keep it simple. The less you have in this area the less can go wrong. I remember 20 years ago you would leave a bag in the transition area with all sorts of goodies. There was so much stuff that you had to think about what you wanted at each transition. Now I leave the absolute minimum in the area so it is easy with no thinking.

Access to the transition area for setup occurs in a window of time before the race. All athletes have to be out of the transition area by a specified time on the program and you cannot return. Make sure you are aware of this closure time and allow enough time to be comfortable with your set up.

Setting out your area

When you come to set out your transition area remember the order in which you will need your items. My transition area to the right has three pieces for the bike (well 4 if you count each shoe) and the same number for the run. The bike gear is in front because I will use it first and there is space behind the run gear where I will drop the swim goggles and cap.



We will now look in detail at the components needed in transition. Once again some content is repeated from other books in the series.

Swim

Nothing you need for the swim should be in transition!!!

You will have everything needed for the swim with you as you wait for the start. (They will later be dropped in transition as you change to the bike)

Bike

Bikes are “hung” on the transition racks. Sometimes it is dictated which end of the bike needs to be hung on the bars but when I have a choice my preference is to hang the bike by the seat.

In some events bike racking occurs on the day before the race so the bike is left overnight. In this case be sure to take your bike pump (or borrow one) to inflate your tyres to the maximum psi on race morning.

In the overnight racking scenario make sure to take your fluids and any nutrition you might have for the bike leg on race morning and set them up before the race.

Nutrition is more important in longer events and can be mounted to the bike in a couple of ways: This can be by using a Gel bottle mounted to the bike or by taping gel packets to the top tube and tear them off one at a time.

You should have your helmet and sunglasses ready to be put on as quickly as possible.

In the picture to the right you can see I have my helmet upside down facing me with the straps laid over the edge. Inside the helmet I have the sunglasses also facing me.

The process for me is to grab the sunnies and put them straight on then roll the helmet straight on and fasten the clip. These are two smooth straight movements without thought required.



Bike Shoes

Cycling shoes deserve a section of their own.

Elite triathletes leave their shoes connected to the bike and run to the mount line at the start of the ride then begin riding before slipping their feet into their shoes. This saves some time but requires practice.

In the last few years I have been seeing people set their bikes / shoes like in the picture to the right.

Notice the rubber bands connecting the back of the shoes to the bike frame? These hold the shoe in place until the rider is on the bike then they snap and fall away with, hopefully for the athlete, at least one foot in a shoe.



My thoughts are mixed on this subject. I know the triathletes who are putting their feet in the shoes

while riding are doing so as they move forward while the person who puts the shoes on in transition are stationary. I generally still do mine in transition and run to the mount line in the shoes. What I have found is I blast past many other triathletes over the first few 100 metres who are still trying to do their shoes up. I have also seen over the years quite a few people fall off their bikes at the beginning while attempting to fasten their shoes ...including professional triathletes at the world championships.

This leads me to think it is not too different which method you use in the long run. The one comment I have with doing your shoes in transition is to have them ready as well. Note the shoes in my transition setup on the previous page. They have the tongues pulled up and the straps laid back and untangled leaving the shoes open for quick access and ready for quick tightening.

Try both methods for yourself and see what works best for you.

Regardless of the method you choose to put your shoes on, I do highly recommend learning to slip your feet out of the shoes as you complete the ride.

Removing Feet from Shoes

Learning to remove your feet from your shoes at the end of the ride can save you a lot of time and is very easy to do.

Start this process during the last 400 – 600 m of the ride, depending on how comfortable and quick you are at the process. All you do is unclip the straps on your shoes, slip the foot out and then sit it back on top of the shoe.

With Velcro closing road or triathlon shoes this is easy. However if you have a road shoe with a ratchet tightener this is a little harder but not at all impossible.



Note. Be cautious of other riders doing the same thing towards the finish as people may wobble around a little more than normal.

Once you have mastered removing your feet you can ride towards the “dismount line” and swing one leg over the bike and have it in front of the leg still on the shoe so you are rolling almost “standing” on one side of the bike. Then when you slow to an easy running pace just step off and start running into transition. Remember to make sure to do this BEFORE the dismount line.

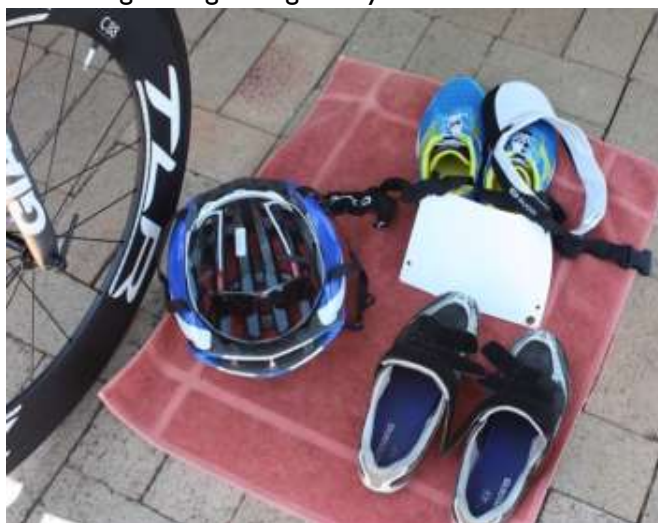
This action also takes some practice and often when I work with people learning this I find some firm grass to practice on in case they fall.

Run

The run part of your transition normally only contains your shoes, race number and a hat if you choose to wear one.

I did the Hell of the West Triathlon in Feb 2013 which is the middle of summer in Australia. The event is close to ½ Ironman length with a 20km run late in the morning. I forgot to grab my hat as I ran out of transition and suffered terribly in the heat and wished for every second that I had remembered my hat.

Now I focus on placement of my run items to make sure I remember to put them on. You can see in the picture my hat is on top with the race number upside down ready to strap around my waist and the shoes last.



Incidentally in a longer event like the Hell of the West you would likely be picking up some more nutritional items like Gels as well in this transition. This is just what I was doing when I missed the hat. The lesson here is if you do something different like add stocking up on nutrition to the transition process, do it in a way that won't confuse you and practice it.

Post-race Transition Access

After the race you will be go to the recovery area where you can have a drink to get rehydrated and usually some fruit etc. to eat. Rehydrating is important and you will feel thirsty for a while afterwards so drink what you can.

I like to go back to the edge of the course as quickly as I can to see all my friends finish their races.

Note. You may be keen to get your bike from the transition area and leave. You need to be aware that transition stays closed until after the last competitor has finished the ride so you can't get your bike till then. Sometimes this can be quite a wait if you are in an early starting wave.

I am sure you now see the value in developing and practicing a good transition strategy. I hope the skills you learned in this book will help you relax during this part of the race and allow you to focus on the main parts of the event which are the swim, ride and run.

Now get out there and Race!!

For more advanced information look for the other eBooks in the "Starting out in Triathlons" series.