The Eliminator, Liverpool, Saturday 3rd May 2025

A swimrun knockout event, a bit like a bleep test for swimrun!

Set at Princes Dock, Liverpool with the beautiful backdrop of the Royal Liver Building, this was an urban take on swimrun.

The course lap was 2.5km; made up of 3 runs and 2 swims (run 700m, swim 200m, run 900m, swim 300m, run 400m) totalling 2km of running and 500m of swimming. If you made it to the final lap you completed 15km. The swim exits were steep onto a ramp, with a rope to pull yourself up on before hurling yourself over the railings at the top. The runs were mostly flat although cobbles, curbs, steps and negotiating the twists and turns of a lock made it more interesting. Diving off the pontoons in full kit was exciting, if not slightly traumatic, as pullbouys and paddles flew in all directions! In swimrun events you have to swim in your trainers, so pull buoys and hand paddles are allowed to be used to aid the swim section.

It was a perfect event for all swimrun abilities. The morning kicked off with the women's race which was overcast with a cool, strong wind which meant the water was choppy.

The race started at a steady pace; warm up pace for some, most unsure as to how long a lap would take. It was a careful balance of going slow enough not to burn out too soon, but quick enough to make the time before the start of the next round. Kate Denham led the women out of the second swim to be the first to cross the line within the under 26 minute cut off and then again for the under 25 minute cut off. At this point 25% of the women had been eliminated. The race picked up in the third and fourth round as Sarah Richardson led the women over the line. By the fifth round a third of the field were stood on the start line and by the final race lap, only three. The race was on! Sarah Richardson took the lead from the start and her impressive running simply blew the ladies away. She maintained the distance with some fast transitions, solid dives off the pontoon and after a strong final swim, sprinted over the line in 18:30.

Final results:

1st. Sarah Richardson

2nd. Sara Owczarczak-Garstecka

3rd. Kate Denmead

Sarah Richardson said afterwards "What a race, I loved it! Such a great venue for swimrun, good swims, challenging swim exits and fast and technical urban running. Really well organised and the atmosphere was great!"

There was a good vibe with very supportive spectators. The lively music added to the atmosphere and the tension at the end of each lap with 'another ones bites the dust' blaring out as competitors scrambled for the finish line to make the time for the next round.

The sun appeared from behind the clouds for the start of the men's race, although the challenge of the chop remained!

Forty men started the second event of the day, having had the benefit of watching the exciting women's event, all new to start steady and pace the first lap. However, as the men entered the first swim it was obvious that the wind conditions were challenging and going to make the swim sections tougher than expected. Two men were eliminated after the first 2.5km lap as the timer ticked over for twenty six minutes.

On to lap two and those that had finished the first lap with time to spare were well rested while others began to struggle, four more 'bit the dust' on the second lap and with no let-up in the wind the eliminator format was proving its worth. Twenty four minutes after the start of the second lap the gun went for the third and off went thirty competitors, now familiar with the course and keen to make the next cut, with the pace hotting up two clear leaders were emerging on each lap Richard Stannard former GBR elite triathlete and three time world aquathlon champion, and Nigel Gaskin, GBR age group triathlete and age group European bronze medallist in aquathlon. Interestingly, both used to race each other nearly thirty years previously at the national swimming championships.

By the start of lap four the field was nearly halved, the cut of time was really starting to ask questions and the wind was not dropping. At the start of the final swim the front group had doubled in size to previous laps as those who had raced the event before knew it was time to turn up the gas. Nigel Gasking suffered a mishap on the swim entry losing a hand paddle but still finished fourth, well inside the cut off.

With only two laps remaining and the cut off down to eighteen minutes the remaining competitors knew it was time for a fast lap. The first run was significantly quicker than previous laps with at least eight athletes entering the first swim within a couple of seconds of each other. The second longer run saw a group form which had to single file out through the lock gates before entering the second swim. Richard Stannard again led the lap and dominated the second swim to finish the penultimate lap in just over seventeen minutes. The eighteen- minute cut off proved a tough challenge with a further eight men eliminated, leaving just five to contest the final lap.

With little to no rest the gun sounded for the start of the final race lap. The pace was significantly raised with the strongest runners trying to gain an advantage over the stronger swimmers. Davide Molinario a previous winner and course record holder for the Liverpool swimrun Eliminator, started very quickly gaining a significant advantage over the first 400m. James Dawes, Rob Davis and Nigel Gaskin all followed with previous lap leader Richard Stannard in last place. As the first run came to the narrow technical section Stannard moved through the field to second place, with Molinario some 20 meters ahead.

Molinario dived into the first swim with a 10 metre lead, Stannard in second and James Dawes, winner of the Bewl Water swimrun 6k solo 2024, in third. Stannard gained the lead in the first swim and never let it go, Molinario had a very strong second run to catch back up with Stannard but it was the second swim which proved decisive as Stannard pulled away to almost a minute lead.

1st Richard Stannard - 15mins 49sec (3 seconds behind Davide Molinario's course record 15:46)

2nd Davide Molinario

3rd James Dawes

4th Nigel Gaskin

5th Rob Davies

Richard Stannard said after the finish – "That is such a fun race format, with the pace increasing each lap the fatigue builds as the pressure mounts and then an all- out race at end! I love it!"