

Tough Guy and Gal 2013

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The Hard Sell

You'll never convince me that paying taxes is fun or that visiting the dentist is either cheap or stress free! However... Just because something is a hard sell doesn't necessarily mean you cannot sell it. Somewhere out there in the wilds of New Zealand, you can always rely on a crazy person to desire pretty much any product or service. And if we're honest, in NZ we have more than our fair share of crazy people don't we?

Tough Guy and Gal Races

Held each winter, in a variety of locations, the races are a combination of assault course, cross-country run and fancy dress party! The outrageous mud-fests are surprisingly well supported with thousands of people taking part in every race. In fact the original venue, Rotorua, is now so popular that three separate race days are held to cope with yearly entrants numbering around the five thousand mark.

So. How does one set about selling cuts, bruises, scrapes and aching muscles? How do you sell exhaustion and cold? Add a helping of slime and mud up to your waist (probably higher!) To be honest I'm not entirely sure, but somehow I did manage to persuade five other people to join me in the mud – Furthermore they enjoyed it! As I said. Crazy.

The race starts gently... With a manic stampede out of a barn (which serves as HQ for the day) and straight up a hill for several hundred metres. Clearly at this point there is much testosterone, naive enthusiasm and misplaced belief in personal ability floating about with almost everyone trying to charge up the hill like an Olympian. Unsurprisingly it only takes 100m or so for unfit bodies to start protesting and the pace slows dramatically.



The Wellingtonians discussing the best tape for keeping shoes in place.

Once you reach the top of the first hill the organisers toy with you a little, providing a gently undulating grass run for the next kilometre. You can almost hear the newcomers thinking to themselves 'Piece of cake' as they race past the older (and wiser?) competitors.

'Pace yourself' I muttered to myself under my breath as a hoard of pink lycra-clad fairies rumbled past...

And then a reality check. 20m of ankle deep mud designed one assumes to fill your shoes with grit and slime, shortly followed by 50m of icy cold, knee deep water! Geez. Then more running up a steady grinding hill along a road – placed no doubt to spread the field before the real fun begins. Happily I overtook the wearying pink fairies half-way up this hill. Strike one for this 'old brute'. Yep, that's the category you get placed in as a male over 40 years old. Bloody cheeky I reckon.

TECH DIVE New Zealand

At the top of the road you are probably a third of the way around the course. From there you head up a steep grassy slope, down the other side, over a couple of hurdles and then... It's the lake! You start in ankle deep mud, progressing rapidly to deeper gloop. Before you know it there's water up to your calf. Pressing onward



This is only the beginning of the mud!

the water gets deeper and deeper, passing your waist and literally freezing your **** off! It peaks about mid chest (or neck if you are vertically challenged like Rob and Brendan) Ahem.

Exiting the water, you race (or stumble) around the far end of the lake with enough time to get some feeling into your lower body before you find yourself upon a floating raft and faced with a leap back into the water. Daunting stuff as it's nigh on impossible to see what awaits you below the scummy surface. (Tip for Newbies – watch the people ahead of you to spot the shallower bits!) Once you've waded out of the water it's on to the main assault course.

Now for the watching crowd maybe this section of the course doesn't look so very terrifying. And in fairness the obstacles aren't particularly large or difficult. But trust me, as a competitor with freezing cold, slime covered legs they look plenty scary enough! In fact I'd go as far as stating (with impunity) this is the point the twisted nature of Event Organisers becomes wholly apparent. Dragging leaden limbs over A frames and hurdles, up and down cargo nets and along balance beams is bloody tricky when you can't feel your extremities. The assault course concludes with a damn near vertical hill to climb, which pretty much finished everybody off. Nice.

For those still upright you get to run some more. Yey! Up and down and up again. When you think the course is flattening you run up again, then down, then up, then up some more... (Maybe I forgot a 'down' but you get the picture) Clearly a good place to chuck in a few more obstacles, including a very innocuous looking set of wires to squeeze under. KERPOW, ZAP ZAP! Yep, the bloody things are naturally of the electrified variety. Funny? Yeah Nah.

Gently sizzling, it's back into the lake (swamp!) It's imperative you watch the people ahead because if you get over confident and hit the deep spots you are so not getting outta there without help. We're talking 'body swallowing' mud – quicksand with serious attitude. Those extra few minutes gained by running up the hills disappears rapidly in this super-gloop (along with your shoes if you haven't taped them securely to your feet!)



Claire and Mel are enjoying themselves - honestly



Finally there's a couple of hundred metres to trot, a low stooped tunnel to negotiate and after you've cleared one final irritating hurdle you are back at the barn which doubles as the finish of the 6km race. For those of us foolhardy enough to enter the longer race it's merely the halfway point. As I trotted back up that initial hill for lap two I was quietly pleased for having paced myself, unlike the pink fairy people who are probably still stuck in the swamp.

Everyone gets prizes at the finish; a mug, a loaf of bread and a dodgy Big Ben pie! The communal showers are warmer than you might expect and should you require any pairs of slightly soiled second hand trainers you can take your pick. There are always hundreds of pairs dumped by weary runners who simply want to put the nightmare behind them.

Of course you now have a whole group of people to get great tips from! We can attest to the best gear for wallowing in mud. We know what equipment is washable afterwards and what isn't. And, as true professionals, we even know how much beer you can drink the night before the race and still compete successfully. What we cannot do is suggest on a good pub in Rotorua. With all of our team coming from Wellington or Auckland we missed a vital point. The Saturday night after the race the Chiefs were playing in the Super-Rugby final and we were in the heart of the Waikato. Trying to get a table and some food was almost bloody harder than the race itself!

So...who's up for it next year then eh?



Thank you to Nicole for the pictures!