

COLUMBIA'S BIKE COURSE ROLLS FROM START TO FINISH



Columbia Triathlon

ELLCOTT CITY, MARYLAND (MAY 18, 2008)

While race director Robert Vigorito has several great triathlons to his credit, his Olympic-distance Columbia Triathlon is wildly popular in the mid-Atlantic for many reasons. Number one: The race is held in beautiful suburban parks and on the lovely roads through the farmlands and forests of Howard County, Maryland, located between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Number two: Columbia attracts a small but sparkling elite field that

includes the likes of two-time Ironman Hawaii winner Tim DeBoom, Olympic bronze-medalist Susan Williams and Escape From Alcatraz champ Matt Reed, in addition to the cream of the East Coast age-group crop. Number three: It was the site of the 1994 and 1997 USA Triathlon amateur national championships and is one of the most in-

vigorating and challenging events in the world for both humble age groupers and the greatest pros on earth. Number four is the area's sumptuous menu for the intrepid traveler, which includes myriad historic sites and fascinating attractions in nearby Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

The race starts in beautiful Centennial

Lake in Ellicott City, adjacent to Columbia, one of the nation's first and best-planned suburban communities. The lake is ripple-free and fresh-fed with comfortable spring-time temperatures averaging between 65 and 71 degrees, although none of this precludes a good amount of competitive jostling to the first few buoys. The 1.5km swim is followed by a longish run through the well-groomed grass of Centennial Park before the scenic 41km bike takes off through the rolling countryside for an unrelenting series of moderate to serious climbs. The route winds through an affluent area that transitions between genteel farms and suburban mini-mansions and stone and immaculate four-rail fences. Reactions to the hills can vary wildly, but the common denominator is respect. USAT Nationals qualifier Robert Mina says, "The bike course at Columbia is the most challenging I have ever raced on. It rolls from start to finish with no flat terrain to be found at all. There are short, steep climbs after corners, a few chicanes and three 40 mph downhill stretches." Williams, who owns the women's overall course record, says, "The course is not super hilly, but it suits my bike strength. Mostly, I love the scenery and the fact that it takes us through rolling country roads in one big loop."

With a men's bike record (Tim DeBoom) of 58:08 and the women's (Jeanne Anne Krizman) of 1:04:32, you know the second leg is tough enough. Still, the race's 10km run is Columbia's ultimate test. The course climbs and encircles Centennial Lake and passes through neighborhoods filled with enthusiastic fans. The race Web site understates the terrain, mentioning four "moderately steep climbs," as well as the more rigorous Gatorade Wall. But a 35-39 age-group competitor who calls herself Velobel-latrigirl gives a much more colorful evaluation on her blog: "Oh my God! Enough with the hills. This was absolutely the WORST 10km course I've ever been on. It may have been scenic ... but I pretty much missed all that on account of being MISERABLE running up hills and then down steep hills." Olympic medalist Williams gives the authoritative review: "The run course is one of the hardest I've ever done. Except for the last stretch across the dam and to the finish, it's all up and down. The run makes it challenging, interesting, and it's a really scenic course through the park."

Once you've finished the race and enjoyed Vigorito's great post-race feed and party, there is a lot to see and do. Historic

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