

Older, Wiser, and Stronger, Too

Structural engineer Roger Brockenbrough is a quarter-century into his second career—as a triathlete.

WHEN IS THE LAST TIME you swam two miles in the ocean? When was the first time? For most people the answer is pretty predictable “never!” But ask Roger L. Brockenbrough, P.E., and you’re likely to be surprised. The 1954 graduate of Virginia Tech is a member of the AISC Committee on Specifications and spent 30 years as a senior researcher at the U.S. Steel Research Center near Pittsburgh. He is also a world-class athlete.

“I didn’t play sports in high school or college,” Brockenbrough said. “But in 1985, at age 51, I started training for triathlons at the urging—OK, nagging—of our oldest son, John.”

The combination sport of swimming, biking and running had begun just a decade earlier and had quickly established itself, in the form of the Hawaiian Ironman competition, as the benchmark of physical endurance. The Ironman triathlon competition consists of three successive legs beginning with a 2.4-mile rough water ocean swim, followed by a 112-mile bicycle race and a 26.2-mile run.

“I soon found that in spite of my non-athletic background, I really liked the training, meeting others who were getting involved in the sport, and competing. It seemed like the more I worked out, the more energy I had. I learned to eat smarter, soon lost a few extra pounds, and felt better than I ever had. It was fun trying to knock a few seconds off that run, or a few minutes off the total.”

“Competing in five-year age brackets also gave one reasonable goals,” Brockenbrough said. “Running and biking came relatively easy, but swimming was more of a challenge. And it still is.”

By 1990 Brockenbrough had developed enough in the sport to qualify for his first world championship competition.

“It was a thrill to compete at that level, and I’ve been pursuing my dreams ever since.”

Over the past 25 years Brockenbrough has competed in

200 triathlons (swim, bike, run) and duathlons (run, bike, run), winning 31 national medals and 20 world medals.

“The longest and toughest races—and the most satisfying—have been the Ironman,” he said. “I’ve done eight of those, seven of which were world championships in Hawaii.” Brockenbrough’s first Ironman was in 2000, at the age of 66. “It took me 15 years to work up enough courage to try one of those long ones, but it went well and I loved it. Again, my son had sort of badgered me. I had talked about doing this, and he said, ‘Dad, you’re not getting much younger, you know; don’t put this thing off too long.’ So I finally gave it a go and it turned out I really liked doing the full triathlon.”

“The first time I did the Ironman I was really just doing it to finish. I paced myself well, and I didn’t get around to checking the results until the middle of the next day, in the afternoon. It turned out I won in my age group by over an hour.”

“One of my favorite accomplishments came in 2009 when I won my age group at the International Triathlon Union (ITU) World Championship Triathlon on Australia’s Gold Coast, the ITU World Championship Duathlon in North Carolina, and the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii. Only one other person in the history of our sport had done that. And it all happened within a four-week period.”

Brockenbrough continues to actively participate in the steel industry. He chairs the AISI Committee on Specifications and a new edition of his *Structural Steel Designer’s Handbook* (co-authored with Frederick Merritt) is due out in 2011.

He also continues to run his share of races: 5k, 10k, half-marathon, and marathon distances (in addition to triathlons). Next up is the Pittsburgh Marathon, May 15, 2011, which coincidentally is the day after the close of the 2011 NASCC: The Steel Conference. It might be a good time to stay in town an extra day and cheer on one of the steel industry’s own. **MSC**



Left: Roger Brockenbrough on the way to his first-place time of 13 hours, 1 minute, 25 seconds in the 2005 Ironman Triathlon on Kona.

Middle: Roger Brockenbrough claiming first place at the Gloucester (Mass.) Triathlon in 2009.

Right: Roger Brockenbrough after the World Triathlon Championship in Budapest, Hungary, September 12, 2010, where he took first place in the 75-79 category.