

WATERWORLD GREAT OCEAN RUN – RACE REPORT

By Ed Brazier

6:15am, Sunday 15 March 2015, I'm standing on the beach at Red Rock. It's cold (in my singlet) and the only familiar face I see is the old war horse himself, Peter Wood. The sand is so soft and I'm thinking to myself "Why are you doing this?". Then, I see another much more familiar face, the one and only "Rocket" Rod Koopmans and he looks pumped! Nerves settled with a bit of idle chit chat and the obligatory (stainless) Steel pre-race brief (you know, the bit where he tells you the course and how well sign posted it is...) and just like that, we're off.

Coming off Coffs Tri last week, my plan was just to start out at a nice easy pace, listen to the body and take it from there. As the dust (more like Red Rock sinking sand) settled I found myself in 2nd position, sitting on the back of some guy with a brown singlet and rattling hydration pack's tail. Heading down the beach it became clear that this guy seemed serious and that rattling hydration pack was doing my head in so I decided to let the line out a bit and see how we went.

We reach Arrawarra with Mr Brown Singlet holding about a minute advantage and easily in my sights. I take on some water, carry on over the headland and find that I'm now a lot closer to the leader. He picks up the pace once back down on the beach and gets his buffer again but at Mullaway it's like déjà vu. I get down on the beach a lot closer to him. This is good. I feel good. This race ends with three big headlands. I could win this!

As the race went on, this is how it went. He pulled away on the beaches but I caught back up on the headlands, Woolgoolga, Sandy Beach and some smaller headlands in between. All the time we were catching and passing the real heroes of this race, the early starters! The people that go out and give it all for 6, 7, 8+ hours and still turn around and clap and cheer when the leaders go past.

We're getting close to Emerald Beach and I'm closer on the beach than I've been in a while. He looks to be faltering and I might get him this little trail traverse before Emerald, I do just that, I pass him on the way down to the beach and I'm leading. I'm what? I'm leading and I'm feeling awesome! I can see Emerald beach, I can see people watching from the headland, I can see a tricky little rocky section with waves breaking around it ahead and I need to make a choice. Do I take the high (more safer) road or the low (more fraught with danger but quicker) road? I take the low road and I...fall flat on my face, quite literally! Brown Singlet takes the high road and moves back into the lead. I continue on the low road and fall flat on my face again.

At Emerald headland I was still in good spirits, even after I realised my faceplants had been clear to see by all support crew out there. Even had a little laugh about it and was confident now that I was in with a good chance. Once again I caught him on the headland trails but this time we had the chance to have a little chat. He informed me that he was starting to suffer, I told him I was feeling good but hadn't been over 25km for a while. I nearly tripped over a kangaroo and then we hit Moonee Beach Reserve. Actually, back to the kangaroos, just after the first kangaroo 2 more appeared on the path and I just assumed they'd move as we drew closer. One did, but only at the last minute, the other, well, he said "No way! You go round." So we did, we had to. These roos are getting cocky.

Moonee Beach Reserve! The longest beach section of the whole race and it is just where it starts to hurt! But it doesn't hurt. It feels good. No, it feels great. I'm leading and I'm flying and I feel like a million bucks! I quite simply cruise it. I reach Moonee Beach itself in complete control. The creek is flowing fast but there's someone on the other side setting up water and other goodies and it's an easy wade to them. I enter the water and realise it's flowing really fast. I should have started further

upstream, but that's ok, as long as I can stand. I can't stand. I'm swimming. I'm quickly bobbling out to sea. Two more strokes. I can feel the bottom again. I crawl out, I look back. No-one in sight. I stop to rehydrate. Old mate asks me if I'm leading. I say "I think so" and up Moonee Headland I go.

After that it seemed like pretty smooth sailing. I still felt great and had well and truly dropped Mr Brown Singlet but it did occur to me that he might not be my only threat. He had faded but until this stage I hadn't really thought about what was going on behind me. I knew Rod (the rocket) Koopmans would be there somewhere and there might be others. Now I was the one running scared!

Sapphire Beach has come and gone and I'm still leading but I'm approaching that tricky rocky section at Opal Cove. I've always got this bit wrong in the past and the sand is always so soft here. I'm getting nowhere and the vultures have to be circling. I reach those rocks and as I step onto them my right calf cramps up! I take a sneaky look back and see that there is indeed a vulture there, one in a blue singlet. I stumble over the rocks, once again taking the low road, once again failing. I get onto the beach and sit down to remove the debris from my shoes. Mr Blue Singlet runs past, looking strong, and says to me "keep going mate". I stand up, both calves cramp up badly and I just howl.

At that stage I thought I was racing for 2nd place. Blue Singlet was pulling away and I was completely in damage control. I immediately dropped a magnesium/salt tablet and thought I'd just hang in to the next water stop. I knew I still had those three headlands up my sleeve but needed to be in a good position to use them.

Just like that we hit the first headland. I see blue singlet disappearing up the stairs and follow about a minute behind. Cramping has stopped but I'm too scared to push too hard in case it returns. There's a tap the other side at Pac Bay and I'll have another mag/salt tab and my last gel there and push it after that. I reach said tap and Blue Singlet has vanished. That dude must be flying. I'm feeling much better and push it over the 2nd headland. Just Diggers and Park Beach to go and once again I'm feeling good.

As I got down to Diggers it was once again great to see a familiar face at the aid station. The one and only John Daffy, just like in the local club triathlons. I wanted to ask him how far ahead Blue Singlet was but I didn't. I just figured I'd get a good sighter on the beach. I didn't, he was nowhere to be seen. There were a few people on the beach and I didn't have my glasses on but I was pretty sure he was out of sight and heading for victory. Diggers Beach was great, hard sand and lots of support leading up to the last headland, my last chance to make this mine.

Macauley's Headland is steep! My whole body now decides it's had enough. It's shutting down, it's letting me down, but I won't let it. We're too close and Blue Singlet can't be that far ahead, surely, mind over matter and all of a sudden I'm heading down towards Park Beach and Blue Singlet is not there. He can't be so far ahead that I can't see him but I CAN'T F\$%#ING SEE HIM!!! I haven't passed him so he's gone, fair play mate, fair play.

Park Beach was long, even longer than the last 2 years. I still couldn't believe how good I felt. The Garmin had ticked over the 42km mark and I'd never felt this good at this distance. As I crossed Coffs Creek I had a sneaky look behind just in case someone was sneaking up but there was no one in sight that way either. I knew I could just cruise in from here but where was Blue Singlet? Had he faltered or gone off course?

Running up the ramp at the jetty and euphoria is starting to take over. I cross the road, pass the yacht club and hit the beach. I can see the finish, I can't see Blue Singlet. I can hear people clapping. I lift my wings out by my side and gently glide over the line to a very happy personal best.

As it turned out, Blue Singlet took a wrong turn at Pacific Bay (like what I did there?). He ended up running an extra 800 metres than me and finished 4 minutes behind me in 2nd. I feel a little hollow about this but he was happy enough after and he did say that he was faltering badly on the last 2km anyway. I was super stoked to see "Hotrod" Koopmans round out the podium too.

Not too far behind the ladies race was also taking place. The effervescent Tina Thompson was well in the mix for most of the way and ended up finishing 2nd but I'm sure she can tell that story way better than I can.