

# A world-best day in Klagenfurt

## Wallenhorst shatters the Ironman world-best time at Karnten Ironman Austria, Kevin Mackinnon reports

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Marino Vanhoenacker set a personal best and broke the course record here in Klagenfurt, blew away a competitive field ... and his performance will inevitably be overshadowed in Ironman history because of Sandra Wallenhorst's unbelievable 8:47:26 time that shattered the world best Ironman time of 8:50:53 set by Paula Newby-Fraser at Ironman Europe in 1994.

You can be forgiven if you aren't familiar with Wallenhorst's name. The 36-year-old from Hanover, Germany, last competed in an Ironman in 2006, where she finished sixth, in a not-world-best-predicting 9:59. Today, in Klagenfurt, Wallenhorst ran down Bella Comerford, a woman who has already won two Ironman

events this year (to give her seven in total). Comerford went 8:51:15, the third fastest official Ironman time in history, and was almost four minutes off the pace. (Before you start e-mailing, notice the "official Ironman" wording here!)

Wallenhorst was as surprised as the rest of us with her amazing performance today.

"I never ever imagined I would do this," she said after the race. "I had no clue I could do this. At 39 km I looked at my watch and thought they had counted the kilometers wrong."

Unlike Chrissie Wellington, who didn't know the Ironman world best time when she missed it by a scant 31-seconds a week ago in Frankfurt, Wallenhorst was completely aware of Newby-Fraser's time.



"I figured I had 15 minutes to run three km and thought 'That's something I can do,'" she said. "I couldn't imagine an 8:47. I was training for a 9:10. I think it was just my day. I have no clue how I could stay under nine hours. I had no imagination of that."

Since her race in Canada in 2006, Wallenhorst had to take a year off due to injury, then missed much of another year when she got pregnant. Her son Philip was born 18-months ago, and she now credits the little guy with her new-found speed:

"I think Philip makes me fast," she laughed. "I have to catch him all the time, so that's what makes me fast."

What probably has more to do with her new-found speed is her new coach, who she started working with after having Philip.

"We train so much harder, so much different to what I did before," she said. "We are now training longer distances, really like in races. We go until my tears are coming. When I cry in training, we don't stop. For the run, twice a week there is interval training and the long runs are up to four hours."

It all adds up to a 30-40 hour training regimen that obviously works. Despite her impressive time, and the fact that she is all-too-aware that eyes will be on her in Kona in October, she doesn't see herself as the fastest on the

planet.

“I know for sure that Chrissie is much faster than me,” she said. “Chrissie wasn’t racing really fast last week – I think she’s still faster.”

All that respect for the defending Ford Ironman World champion didn’t seem to stop her from going past one of Wellingtons team mates, Bella Comerford, during the run. Comerford rode away from the women’s field here today, which was no-mean feat considering this field included the likes of last year’s seventh place finisher in Kona, fast-swimming and biking Dede Griesbauer. Comerford enjoyed 6:10=2 0lead off the bike, but Wallenhorst was close enough that she overcame that deficit. Comerford’s 3:04 marathon would normally have been enough to nail yet another win, but when your competition blazes through a 2:54, going over three hours doesn’t quite cut it.

While the huge thunderstorm and rain the athletes experienced out on the course here today didn’t seem to slow Wallenhorst down one bit, men’s champ Marino Vanhoenacker definitely felt the effects of the wet conditions on the bike.

“I had hoped for rain to go under eight hours, but I didn’t ask for it to be on the bike already,” Vanhoenacker laughed after the race. “It was quite dangerous. It’s not a really technical course, but there are three or four corners that you have to go really slow, and even going slow I found the bike was still shifting under me. There’s one turn that’s difficult when it’s dry, today I took it at the pace a grandmother would go on her way for groceries. It was much slower on the bike today.”

Even when he wasn’t going at his “grandmother’s pace” around the corners, Vanhoenacker found the slippery conditions to be a challenge. “On the really steep c limbs the wheels were spinning, especially on all the paint that people put on the roads.”



The wet conditions couldn’t dampen Vanhoenacker’s enthusiasm one bit, though. He was thrilled to get another win here in Klagenfurt.

“I’m getting used to it, and, to be honest, I’m liking it a lot,” he laughed.

After chasing France’s Charly Loisel through the first loop of the bike, Vanhoenacker was surprised to see the leader on the side of the road.

“I was going to try to make up some time on Charly on the second loop, but I didn’t think I was going to catch him,” Vanhoenacker said. E2He crashed on the first loop, which might have been why he got a flat 30 km later.”

Once he was in the lead, it was racing as normal for Vanhoenacker – he came off the bike with an eight-minute lead.

“I knew I had eight minutes on the guys, so I tried to run 2:48 pace, because I knew that to beat me they would have to run 2:40. I was on 2:43 pace early on, then I slowed down to 2:47 pace. Then I saw that I only had six minutes in Klagenfurt, so I pushed things a little bit to the 2:45 pace that I finished at. In the end I guess it was enough because eventually the guys dropped off that pace.”

To gain those two minutes=2 0on Vanhoenacker, Stephen Bayliss was tearing up the course here. He lost some time on the Belgian over the last 10 km of the run, but his 2:44 marathon was fast enough to easily get the Brit to the line in second.

While the men’s race was exciting, the incredible women’s performances today will be the long-remembered result of this amazing 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in Austria.

More than 2,200 athletes are here in Klagenfurt to enjoy a day of racing that even a thunder shower and rain

dampen or quiet down – the usual huge, enthusiastic crowds were on hand to witness one of the greatest days of Ironman racing ... ever.