

RACE SCENE



Top: Getting ready for the unique Phuket swim – a 1.2km sea swim, followed by a run up the beach, before the final 700m in a freshwater lagoon; **Above:** The quad-zapping climbs on the 90km bike; **Right:** E-K visits the hurt box in the latter half of the run



SEASON THAI-UP

70.3 pro racer and 220 contributor **Emma-Kate Lidbury** wrapped up her breakthrough 2011 season by travelling to Phuket, Thailand, for the Ironman 70.3 Asia Pacific Championships. Here, she talks us through the experience...

IM 70.3 ASIA PACIFIC CHAMPS

Phuket, Thailand,
4 December '11

For me, the choice of Thailand or Britain in December didn't take a great deal of deliberation. Throw a week-long triathlon festival into the mix and that smell of burning rubber is me screeching off to Heathrow. I'd heard great things about the Laguna Phuket race, and the fact their tri festival was going to include the Ironman 70.3 Asia Pacific Championships for the second year running seemed like too great an opportunity to miss.

On arrival in Phuket there's no gentle introduction to the Thai way

of life: the hustle and bustle is full-on and it's a sensory overload like no other. Tuk tuks, taxis, street sellers, tour guides – they all want you and your business. The heat, humidity and noise are intense yet strangely welcoming. Climb into a taxi and head to the Laguna Phuket resort and the pace of life slows significantly.

Set in 1,000 acres of tropical parkland with three kilometres of stunning beaches, the resort is home to a collection of deluxe hotels and villas which welcome visitors from all over the world. Elephants trundle along the roads and you could while away all day on the white sandy beaches without even realising it.

SHIFTING IT

Of course, for me, this wasn't a lazy beach holiday. I was here to

race and, having had the best season of my tri career to date, I was keen to finish it in style. [E-K won three Ironman 70.3 titles – UK, Mallorca and Augusta – and achieved top-10 finishes at the 70.3 Worlds in Vegas and the Abu Dhabi Triathlon in March.]

The line-up in the pro field was nothing short of stellar, with Chris Lieto and Michael Raelert headlining the men's race, and 70.3 world champion Melissa Rollison, six-time Kona champion Natascha Badmann and multiple Ironman winner Belinda Granger topping the bill in the women's. With plenty of other strong girls also due to race, I knew I was going to have to 'shift it' to achieve my pre-race goal of a top-three placing.

The week-long triathlon festival kicks off with the Laguna Phuket



MEET E-K LIDBURY

Age 31

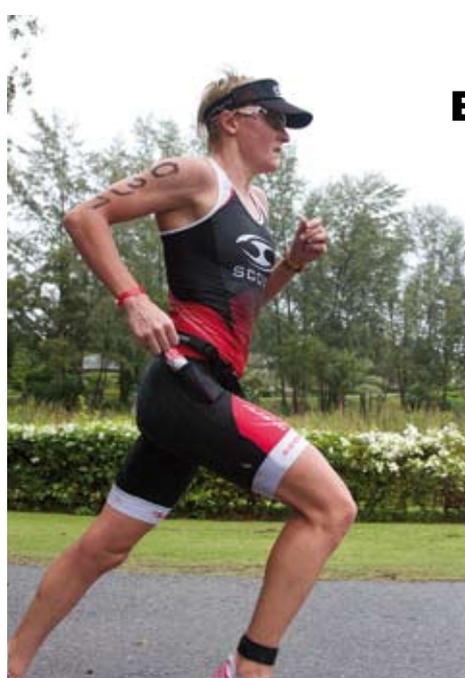
Profession

Journalist-turned-triathlete

Lives Oxford

Background Competitive swimmer; age-group triathlete until 2009

Why I raced Phuket It seemed like the perfect way to end a great year – and I wasn't wrong!



Far left: E-K coming through for fourth place; Left: Reigning 70.3 world champ Melissa Rollison; Below: Michael Raelert, and elephant, taking the win; Below left: The top five ladies celebrate



Triathlon – a 1.8km swim, 55km bike and 12km run, which is commonly referred to as the LPT and is now in its 18th year. Having arrived the day before it, I decided against taking part but it did look like a lot of fun, as was the post-race party.

Throughout the week there was plenty to get involved in – an open-water swimming competition, practice rides of the bike course with multiple Ironman winner Jurgen Zack, speed golf, *A Question of Sport* quiz night and plenty more. Very soon, though, race weekend was approaching and it was time to hit it hard for one final time in 2011...

SELF-PRESERVATION

The swim course here is unlike any other I've raced: after a mad dash down the beach into the ocean, it's a 1.2km swim in the tropically warm waters of the Andaman Sea before running back up the beach and across into a freshwater lagoon for the final 700m. It was one of the toughest swim courses I've done and I certainly didn't have the best of swims, for me, but once out onto the bike I soon got into a rhythm.

The bike course is nothing short of phenomenal: although most of it's flat, there are a set of climbs at 40km and again at about 70km that are real quad zappers.

With a few tropical storms in the days before the race, there had been plenty of debate about whether some of the hills would even be passable if the heavens opened on race day. None of us was too delighted, then, when, at about the 60km stage, the rain really came down. It was so heavy you could barely see your front wheel and the race suddenly became less about time and all about preservation.

At this point I was riding with Granger and Amanda Stevens. Rollison and Badmaan were the only two women in front of us. Racing with Belinda is always a lot of fun and this was no exception. Anyone who knows her knows she is a larger than life personality who loves to chat – even while racing! I had ridden the bike conservatively so wasn't surprised when I ran out of T2 feeling fresh.

MENTAL TRICKS

The 21.1km run course is a two-lap affair that, although flat, involves a

mix of tarmac, trails and grass so there's plenty to test the legs. Throughout the first lap I felt comfortable and was holding onto third place but could see there were a handful of girls not too far back who were running well.

The latter half of the run definitely involved climbing into the hurt box. It felt like my pace was slowing a little but the effort certainly wasn't diminishing.

I used every mental trick in the book to get my body to respond but when Czech ITU racer Radka Vodickova came past me there was little I could do to go with her. "Keep working, keep working." I'd tell myself in the hope that I could

close the gap back up to her. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be: she grabbed the final spot on the podium, behind Badmann and Rollison, respectively, and I finished fourth.

Afterwards I couldn't help but feel a little disappointed. I'd wanted that podium place and had just missed it but, equally, this was no time to be down. I'd just concluded my best season of professional racing and my result puts me in second place on the Vegas points rankings going into 2012. It was time to crack open a beer – and what better place to do it than the legendary post-race party. Cheers! **220**

RESULTS

1.9km swim | 90km bike | 21.1km run

ELITE MEN	SWIM	BIKE	RUN	OVERALL
1 Michael Raelert, GER	23:34	2:14:17	1:11:14	3:51:36
2 Richie Cunningham, AUS	23:55	2:14:07	1:16:44	3:57:16
3 Paul Matthews, AUS	23:39	2:14:13	1:18:02	3:58:24
4 Timothy Reed, AUS	24:08	2:19:35	1:13:29	3:59:57
5 David Dellow, AUS	23:38	2:14:07	1:20:44	4:01:11

ELITE WOMEN

1 Melissa Rollison, AUS	27:32	2:26:39	1:19:43	4:17:01
2 Natascha Badmann, SUI	30:00	2:26:01	1:30:57	4:30:42
3 Radka Vodickova, CZE	26:13	2:39:04	1:26:25	4:34:50
4 Emma-Kate Lidbury, GBR	26:47	2:35:02	1:30:54	4:36:09
5 Tamsin Lewis, GBR	28:29	2:36:47	1:27:45	4:36:14