**Thule Adventure Team Race Story**

**Winner Adventure Racing World Championship 2011**

**Stomach bugs, freezing cold water sections, inpenetrable rainforests, wombats, venomous snakes and scary sleepmonsters – as predicted the Adventure Racing World Championship held in Tasmania November 2-11 became an epic struggle between the best multisport teams in the world. Following their successful performances in 2011, Thule Adventure Team managed to to stick to their hardcore strategy and claimed the victory after 5 days, 10 hours and 57 minutes.**

**The winning strategy**

By staying focused, minimum sleep, keeping a fast pace and making few mistakes Thule Adventure Team could cross the finish line in Burnie one hour ahead of Team Silva Gerber, another part-swedish team, followed by Team Seagate (NZL), just minutes behind.

– We were very focused. Everyone in the team were prepared to do their utmost, which we knew we had done when we crossed the finish line, says the team captain Martin Flinta, who has learned the hard way that adventure racing is all about avoiding mistakes, or at least minimizing the mistakes.

– You need to be prepared on all kinds of things that can happen during a long race; very little, just an hour or so, separates the top teams even after five days of racing. To win a race like this you have to be focused, not only during the race but also before the event.

  As an example of Thule Team’s thouroughness Myriam Guillot and Jacky Boisset, the couple from french Pyrenées, spent several weeks prior the race in Tasmania. The team were prepared on the special climate with warm days and cold nights, and the challenging terrain. It seems that the Thule Team best of all teams managed the variuos difficulties that emerged during the race.

– Just like many other teams we were affected by stomach bugs, which slowed us down for a while, but we learnt from experience always to bring anti-bacterial medicine and Imodium pills. Everyone who race on this level ought to know that. During the whole race we also spent a lot of time checking and double checking our mandatory gear. It is very easy to forget details and make simple mistakes when you are in a hurry. But we chosed to spent that extra time to minimize chance.

  From experience the Thule team also chosed durable rather than lightweight bike gear, knowing that mechanical problems cost time and energy, which you cannot afford if you want to win a tight race. More than rigorous preparation and substantial race experience, the team has a very high level of fitness and technical skills.

– We all shared the ambition and the determination it takes to win, to really push ourselves. Being both mentally and physically prepared enabled us to follow our strategy in keeping a fast pace. We had agreed on running instead of walking wherever that was possible. Bringing out the most of the team also meant pulling the slowest with a cord whenever possible or necessary. To win you have to leave your comfort zone: if it feels good you’re not pushing hard enough.

  The non-stop format also force the teams to sleep as little as possible, particularly the teams that race for the top positions.

– Sleep-wise we pushed ourselves harder than we ever done before in a race.  Instead of stopping for sleep breaks we took turns sleeping during the kayak legs. The gentle splashing sound of water works well with sleeping, however sleeping while kayaking can be risky: waking up by waves, or falling out.

**Panic in the Canyon**

The race started with 17 K Kayaking. All teams got one inflateble raft and one sit-on-top kayak.

– Since our raft were leaking only one could paddle, the other one had to draw out water with a bottle. But it went OK and at the transistion we were among the top teams, 11 minutes behind the favourites Team Seagate (NZL).

  The following 20 K Orienteering section included clay target shooting. If a team missed all of their five shots they had to serve a 10 minute penalty. After a navigational error the team switch to the short (20 K) Bike section 30 minutes behind the leaders. A wet caving section follows before another 50 K Mountainbiking which brings Thule up to 4th place. During the first night they continue with 60 K Mountain running and Canyoning.

– In the early morning Day 2 we trekked along some rapids for 6 K, but due to the steepness of the river banks, swimming was inevitable. The water was freezing cold, maybe 10° C and we got very cold instantly. Without wetsuits or any safety gear this section felt very dangerous. We actually almost panicked. Since we wanted to survive we decided to stay away from the cold water and instead trek along the steep, dense forest next to the narrow gorge in the Levin River. By doing this we lost at least 1,5H to leading teams Silva and Seagate. Hypothermia is a frightening state. It drains your body of energy and slows down every action.

**Cold Shivers**

Also the following section of the course left the team with cold shivers. The 12 K kayaking on Lake Mackintosh, a hydro lake created from a flooded forest fire. With all four in the inflatable kayak it becomes another wet and cold ordeal. Jacky and Myriam have wetsuits, Per Vestling, the team navigator, has only neoprene shorts, but Martin has once again to fight the hypothermia having packed his wetsuit in a gearbox for the last kayak section. They take turns sleeping 15 minutes each. Another 20 K in sit-on-top kayaks follows.

– We had planned to save some time using a trolley running with the kayaks 5 K instead of kayaking 8 K, but the trolley was too weak for the two kayaks and we had to struggle a lot to make progress.

  It’s pitch black when the team finally finish the section. Martin is shivering beyond control; assembling the bike takes him about 20 instead of the usual 3-4. Here they learn that leading Team Seagate will be penalised with 4 hours at the last CP for not carrying the GPS transponder, which is compulsory equipment. The team bike during the night, in darkness and rain. Per’s navigation is spot-on. At several occasions they almost crash with wombats and mini-kangaroos. For a while one runs in front of the team, refusing to let them pass.

**Taking the lead**

They reach Mid Camp in Strahan at dusk, a compulsory 6hr stop for all teams. After cleaning and packing the bikes they enjoy a served breakfast before trying to  get as much sleep as possble. But it’s difficult to sleep in the hot tents. Per and Martin also have stomach problems.

– It must have been something in the food we were served at Mid Camp, because except from that meal we always used water purifier.

  They head out on the 65 K Trekking section as third team. It starts with 35 K beach trek along the west coast. Several times they have to swim. Per and Martin still fight stomach problems but thanks to Jacky’s stomach pills (antibacterial + Imodium) they eventually start to feel better. Martin also struggles with ‘runners knee’ and limps, making good use of the trekking poles. They need almost 24 hours to cover this testing section through sand dunes, dense rainforest, swamps and mountains, and some close encounters with venomous snakes. Team Silva is still at the transistion point. Appearently they have also had stomach problems. After a swift transition Thule leaves Silva behind and set out on the 150 K bike section. They are now on 2nd place a few hours after leading Seagate who has pushed hard to extend the gap towards the chasing teams. This long bike section proves very challenging with difficult navigation and overgrown trails, partly through a swamp, that are more or less impossible to trace. After 3-4 hours of micro orienteering and plenty of assuming they finally reach the CP.

– Knowing we had gained on Seagate gave us extra energy. At dusk we found a little bar in a mining town where we bought as much cold Coca-Cola and potato chip we could carry. After having slept almost an hour in a yard we felt re-energized and could push ahead with good pace.

  To their surprise they suddenly see the headlamps from another team. But it’s not Team Silva having somehow have passed them but leading Seagate. The two teams reach the transition separated only by a few minutes. But the New Zealanders are pretty tired and chose to sleep after having kept a fast pace for a long time.

**Sleepmonsters along the river**

Instead of sleeping Thule decides to carry on, despite their coma-like state. They are soo sleepy that it takes them twice the time as usual to pack their bikes and inflate the kayak. The Kayak section along Arthur River is 75 K, and includes three CP’s which requires another 12 K Trekking. There is a small possibility to cover the whole section without having to camp on the river bank, since teams have to stay off the river during the “dark zone” between 19,30 pm and 06,00 am. At the second CP Seagate overtake Thule, having chosen a shorter trekking route through the dense, steep rainforest.

– Due to our zombie-like sleepiness we were moving very slowly. Maybe we should have slept earlier. The severe lack of sleep made us hallucinate and see lots of strange things; the whole forest was alive. We really experienced “sleepmonsters”. Getting stuck with our backpacks in the dense spiderweb-like jungle didn’t help either. Sometimes it took several minutes just to make 20 metres of progress.

But Thule knows that they have 4 hours in their favor to Seagate, so they continue in their own pace. At 7,30 pm they have about 15 K still to go, but now have to stop kayaking due to the dark-zone. After making a camp fire and eating they fall deply asleep.

– We slept like little pigs and nobody woke up by the alarm, even though we all slept with our watches against our ears. Instead we missed the start at 6,00 am with 37 minutes.

  Reaching the transition point to the following Bike section 70 K they learn that Seagate is just about an hour ahead. The team agree go ride carefully but strong, because Silva is chasing somewhere behind. A full nights sleep has done the team good and Thule can finish the section without losing any further time to Seagate.

**Reaching the finish**

With just two short legs to go, Thule Team knows the victory is within reach. But the 25 K Trail Run along the coast has several challenging sections, like balancing narrow jagged rocks, and the orienteering is tricky.

– We were quite stressed when we couldn’t find the last checkpoint. But after some searching we finally found it. We had to be very careful though, since we knew there was Tiger Snakes in the area. We had already stumbled across a big one and knew it’s one of the most venomous snakes in the world. Arriving at the transition we met Team Seagate who has sat out almost half their 4-hour penalty.

  Since Silva was chasing from behind they make a swift transition to the final 35 K Bike leg that will take them to the finish in Burnie. They manage to avoid mistakes but at the end Mimi (Myriam) is so sleepy that she almost crash into Jacky’s rear wheel. At least this incident has an awakening effect. After 5 days, 10 hours and 57 minutes Thule Adventure Team reach the finish as the first team.

– It was a profoundly wonderful feeling to cross the finish line as world champions: we all felt a deep relief. We made it!

  About one hour later it’s time to salute 2nd placed Team Silva crossing the finish just a few minutes before Seagate. After some fast food and showers they finally get to sleep, at least for 12 hours.

– The victory in Tasmania put an end to a very successful 2011 for our team. In 2012 the Adventure Racing World Championship will take place in France, where we will try to defend the world champion title.

**Thule Adventure Team’s Race Results 2011:**

First place in Huairasinchi in Equador, which qualified the team to ARWC.

First place in Swedish Multisport Championship.

4 x First place in Swedish Multisport Cup.

First place in Le Grand Raid, France.

First place in Expedition Idaho, USA.

First place in Schwartzwald Race, Germany.

First place in Adventure Racing World Championship, Tasmania.

Thule Adventure Team in ARWC 2011:

Martin Flinta (Sweden)

Per Vestling (Sweden)

Myriam Guillot (France)

Jacky Boisset (France)

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