

How would you fare in a race if you swapped your current tri gear for 1989-vintage equipment? **Mark Kleanthous** ran two races to find out...

THE RACES 1989 v 2009

RACE 1 1989 gear

Location Big Cow National Sprint Championships, 7 June 2009

Distance 750m swim/20km bike/5km run

Finishing time 1:18:11

Getting into the cold lake at Emberton in my vintage 1989 Terrapin shortie wetsuit was a challenging experience. In the early 1980s I remember having to put thick tinfoil under my swim cap to help reduce heat loss!

Not long after the klaxon sounded, I could feel the cold hitting my extremities – the shortie giving me zero protection and even less buoyancy. My old-fashioned Speedo goggles were faring no better; in fact, I was starting to feel almost claustrophobic.

After about 400m I had to really focus to maintain a long swim stroke, the cold water reducing it with every pull. With mild hypothermia my mind was working slower than my body. I felt I was whizzing along, when in reality I was simply padding.

Starting the bike with cold fingers I found

it really difficult changing gears. But as I began to warm up, I got a real physical buzz, and remembered the thrill I used to feel as the blood started to rush around my cold body.

The trip down memory lane soon came to an abrupt end, though, when I tried to call out to a cyclist ahead and realised my speech was slurred from hypothermia! Being so cold and disoriented, I also forgot to drink anything.

At T2 I struggled to remove my helmet with my now frozen cold fingers. It's a good job lace locks were around in the 1980s as there was no

finished, I tried to hold a warm drink but my hands were shaking so much I ended up spilling half of it! My body felt and reacted just like it used to all those years ago.

RACE 2 2009 gear

Location Big Cow Sprint Race (same course), 28 June 2009

Distance 750m swim/20km bike/5km run

Finishing time 1:07:47

With a wetsuit to help me swim fast and keep me warm, I entered the lake after the race

“At transition two I struggled to remove my helmet with my now frozen-cold fingers. It's a good job lace locks were around in the 1980s”

way I could have done up normal ones.

Soon I was jogging out of transition, flat-footed from cold feet which had never warmed up in my wet cotton socks. More people passed me on the run than normal as my hamstrings and quads were tight from the cold. Once I

briefing and swam back and forth for about 200m. Two weeks before, when I was wearing the 1989 kit, I hadn't dared do a warm-up in my paper-thin shortie get-up. Two weeks on and I warmed up as I would for any 21st century race, with some fast turnover of the arms to get



blood into my muscles without creating any unnecessary fatigue.

The klaxon sounded and I went off as hard as I could. I soon found a good draft behind a faster swimmer and placed my hands just above his feet to get pulled along.

The Zone3 wetsuit was not only fast in the swim, but I was also able to remove it quickly without any force and without using up vital energy. At T1 I hopped effortlessly onto my Scott Plasma, with bike shoes already clipped in at the correct angle and elastic bands attached to the tabs. Within 50m my feet were inside the shoes and I was on my way, tucked in the aero position on my Vision bars – incomparably quicker than with the 1989 gear.

With a wide range of 10-speed gears, I was able to change with a click of my thumb on the bar-end shifters without reducing the air-flow over my body. The range of gears also allowed me to keep an optimum cadence of over 90rpm.

T2 was fast and furious. Immediately I got into my running legs, a result of the carbon fibre bike. I finished well and recovered quickly.

1989 v 2009 THE VERDICT

Having raced two identical-length races on the same course in two weeks, I can safely say the equipment used made a huge difference to my times. The most marked difference was in the swim, where I was 1:31mins slower in the 1989 shortie wetsuit (which works out at 12.1 seconds slower per 100m).

The Zone3 wetsuit used for the present-day race not only helped me record a quicker time, but was, perhaps more importantly, much more comfortable. The suit itself was very buoyant and flexible around the shoulders – where I needed it most – while the arm and leg cuffs made it very easy to remove once out of the water, reducing my time spent in T1.

The difference in the bike leg was also marked. On the 1989 Colnago 5-speed I took nearly four minutes longer to complete the course, which isn't surprising when you look at the average speeds. On the 2009 Scott Plasma I was averaging 36.5km/h (22.7mph) compared to the Colnago's 32.5km/h (20.2mph). Given the carbon fibre, aerodynamic design of today's bikes, the difference is unsurprising.

On the run there wasn't much difference going on kit-wise. But the fact I'd had to expend so much extra energy during the swim and bike sections in the 1989 race meant I was already exhausted come the final leg. What really made the difference, though, was feeling the cold. Hypothermia kicking in after the swim really slowed me down and made performing well far more difficult. I completed the 2009 run four minutes quicker than my 1989 effort.

All this added up to a massive time difference – using the 2009 kit I was 10:24mins faster, which is phenomenal in a sprint. Give me the noughties any day!

1989 v 2009 IN COMPARISON

The kit and nutrition Mark used in 1989 and what he uses now...



1989

- » Wetsuit Terrapin shortie 5mm (dry weight 738g, wet 1.3kg)
- » Bike Colnago five-speed, no indexed gearing or special aero adaptations; vented helmet
- » Race nutrition Two rounds of toast and honey two hours before the race, orange squash (approx 6% concentration) and block of Kendal mint cake 20 minutes before the start

2009

- » Wetsuit Zone 3 (dry weight 1.1kg, wet 1.2kg)
- » Bike Scott Plasma with indexed gears, Xentis 4 spokes, Look Titanium pedals; Shimano SH 150 shoes; Bontrager Race X Lite Pro tyres; aero helmet
- » Race nutrition Porridge three hours before the race, 2p/Wit caffeine gel 25 minutes before the start, 250ml Hi Five carbo drink during 20km bike, post-race protein recovery drink