

Kona's Quickest

With his huge power output, few can match Ain-Alar Juhanson on the bike. **Liz Barrett** met the Estonian Express

Meeting the 6ft 4in, 100 kilo Ain-Alar Juhanson is not dissimilar to what I imagine is like standing at Everest base camp. At 5ft 4in, staring up at an extra foot of solid wall of man can be quite disconcerting. As can the handshake. I swear I heard metacarpals crack. But I'm giving the wrong impression. Juhanson is triathlon's gentle giant. A man so easy to get on with that he doesn't even mind losing the odd race. In fact, he prefers it.

Not that losing is an option for an Ironman. As one of the strongest – some would say 'the' strongest – cyclist in the long-distance community, last year Juhanson clocked a 4:26:14 bike split over Kona's 180km course at an average speed of 25.21mph (40.57kph). Insightful to sprint- and long-distance athletes alike, Ain was happy to share his tips for your biking success... →



Skiing was Juhanson's first love, with the sport still forming the bulk of his winter training schedule

Ain on training... I used to train a lot more but, now I have a new coach, I've been concentrating more on quality. It's more or less 30 hours a week: I bike around 700-800km, run 80-100km and swim 20km.

Three times a week I do core work and work on stability muscles and deep muscles, which you don't really use [see *Core training with Ain*, p60] – all to strengthen my body and make sure that I stay injury free. I think it's really a big part of Ironman training, because we do a lot of volume and we tend to forget that it's not only about the big muscles but also the small ones which prevent injuries. And we have to take care of them.

On skiing... When I was five I went out cross-country skiing with my dad. Skiing was my first love and I went to ski school. In the last couple of years of ski school – I think I was 16 or 17 – I started to do triathlon in the summer. In my first race, I won the National Champs and it was really fun to do. I really enjoyed the three different sports. I've just kept going since then.

As for skiing, it's a great way to develop endurance. I skied twice a day over the winter and it made up the main part of my training. I've been doing it so long that it's easy for me.

On recovery... There's no rule but sometimes in a hard week, say, I won't have a rest day. But usually this one day is still active rest. It's not only your body that needs to rest but your mind also. Like in Lanzarote I might go windsurfing. Keep your body active and blood flow going because it helps you to recover but you still rest your mind. Keep it fresh and do something else.

On his strongest discipline... We've been working on my bike for the past two years. You can't forget your strongest part; I still work on it a lot and on the quality.

I work on the swim and run a lot but it's three sports and you have to find the balance.

On nutrition... It's one of the biggest challenges. It's just hard to find the right formula to feed myself during an Ironman. That's why I have a nutritionist. I don't have a written-down schedule of what I have to eat but it's more about getting the basics and the main core values. That's vital as I travel a lot and you never know what you're going to get.

I think it's really important for everyone to find their own formula... Just trying to find what works for you. Ironman is about knowing yourself and, if you do, you can respond to different problems.

On tapering for a race... Especially on the bike we do some motor-based skill stuff. We do it in the run and swim as well... The intensity goes up and the volume goes down a little. There's no secret weapon or something special I do. I just accumulate all the training I've done before and just keep a little rest more for the body. That's where the performance starts.

I change to my race bike a month before a race or maybe a little bit earlier, depends how I feel. But it's needed and that's the mistake I made last year before Ironman Lanzarote. I only had two weeks before the race and I wasn't as powerful as I wanted to be.

This is why I do a race three weeks before Lanzarote [Ain will be doing the *Wildflower Triathlon on 3 May*] to make sure I'm on a race bike earlier.

Ain-Alar's great Scott

Model Scott Plasma 2

Size L

Bar drop 21cm

Saddle setback 4.2cm

Saddle height 86.5cm
(centre of bottom bracket to centre of saddle)

Saddle Fizik Arione
(Estonian special!)

Stem Vision 100mm

Bars Hed Advantage 8

Cranks/power meter
Shimano Dura Ace 58/48,
SRM wireless 180mm

Rear derailleur
SRAM Force (with KCNC
ceramic jockey wheels)

Front derailleur SRAM Force

Shifters SRAM

Chain Shimano

Cassette Shimano 11-23

Brake levers SRAM

Brakes SRAM Force

Wheels Hed Jet 60 C2

Tyres Continental Triathlon
clincher, 23mm

Bottle cages Scott

Pedals Time RSX

On training abroad... I go to Tuscon, Arizona, in the United States to train in the desert – it's 40°C every day. It's dry but it's really warm. It helps to overcome the heat and humidity at Ironman Hawaii.

The heat in Hawaii is not the problem; it's the humidity that doesn't help the big guys or those from the northern hemisphere. It's important to stay in a similar climate.

On travelling... Scott developed a really nice soft bag for the Plasma, but people always ask me how can I travel with a soft bag? But I've been travelling with it for three years now, all around the world, and nothing has ever happened to my bike.

It's really light, and it's just easy. You just take your wheels and the handlebars off and that's it. It's very convenient and a good way to travel, I think.



“I don’t find my size is an obstacle... if you’re bigger you’re more powerful. And there are places where you’re faster than the little guys”

On his kit... I train on a Scott Addict. It’s just a regular road bike because I do a lot of road racing back home and it’s more comfortable. That’s especially true in Lanzarote what with the winds and the climbs.

I run in Mizunos. I’m 100 kilos so it’s hard to find shoes which really respond.

I actually race in race flats, but it has to be a good race flat. I used to run in Nikes and they were really good shoes, but the sizing didn’t suit the width of my foot. They were a little bit narrow. The Mizunos are a little bit different in shape. It’s just a case of trial and error.

I use Sidi T2 carbon bike shoes. I used to have plastic ones but I had a fall in Hawaii going up Palani road and they bent like a banana. They were just too soft.

On his bike... I love my Plasma... I don’t let anybody else touch my bike because I don’t want to blame anybody if something happens. Better to do it yourself and be sure that if you make mistakes they’re your own fault. But I’m not really a geek who changes things every day.

I do experiment with positions and try to find the best one for me. I used to ride with

the seat nose level with the bottom bracket; now I’m 4.2cm behind. It feels better and more powerful so I think I’ll stick with it.

On his size... I don’t find that my size is an obstacle. Everyone should accept who they are. Listen, I’m 100 kilos, 220lbs and I can still do competitive triathlon, and I think you have to be happy with who you are.

Just work with your benefits; if you’re bigger you’re more powerful. And there will be places where you’re faster than the little guys.

On racing... I race only with power because in the first 50km of Hawaii [World Champs, 2008] people were passing me, but I was still sticking to the power and afterwards I was first fastest [Juhanson averaged 308 watts on the bike].

It's important to know what you're capable of and race on our limits because that's what we have to do in Ironman – race for ourselves, not with everybody else.

On tackling hills... It's much easier to keep your speed and accelerate. As the hills get bigger, it's much more economical to sit down and just keep pedalling.

However, in the windy places, it's sometimes easier to use my power and the weight to go up, standing on my bike.

On his family... I got married last July. My wife is a gymnast and has competed in 13 world championships, so she understands sports really well.

My father was a cyclist, he's 81 now. He wasn't professional but a proper biker. My family are really sporty, so it's a good influence and a good environment in which to become a sportsman.

On the forthcoming season... Three weeks after Ironman Lanzarote is Challenge Kraikau, a half Ironman in Germany. End of June is looking quite crazy – I'm doing the National Champs, a five-day race, a time trial and a one-day race.

Then my own race on 8 August [Ain organises the Paide Triathlon in Estonia] and then Hawaii. The second half of the year is more a build-up to Hawaii. The beginning is qualification and basic training.

On the future... Post triathlon, hopefully I can become a theTriLife.com coach. I already work back home in Estonia. There's a guy from morning TV. He's started to train publicly and we have a twice-monthly show for five minutes about that. I'm really enjoying the process.

I think I have a lot to give with my experience and knowledge. I do want to be involved in sport and finding different ways to do it.

On his tri career... I'm a triathlete and getting the fastest bike leg in Hawaii or Lanzarote is just part of the journey. I'm happy if it happens but I have to say I've never won any races having the fastest bike leg. In Lanzarote, twice I've won and I think I was second fastest on the bike both times. It's not so important.

That's why if I come third, sixth, 10th... I just give it my all on the day and I accept it. I'm a pretty good loser. When I lose, it makes me stronger. If I win it makes me weaker, actually, because it makes you more comfortable and you get a little bit lazy. If I'm a little bit off where I want to be, it makes me more angry and hungry to do more. And you achieve more, so I think it's good to be a little bit away from your dreams. **PRO**

Core training with Ain

One of the key areas which Ain pinpoints in his training is core work. Often overlooked, core work is essential for building strength in every muscle, which in turn increases power and reduces injury...



Exercise 1

Lie on your front, flat on the ground with your arms outstretched (pic 1). Lift alternate arms and legs, 10 times on each alternate movement (2).



Exercise 2

Lie flat on the ground, lift your body and twist to one side (1). Repeat on both sides 10 times each. Now relax, lie face down and raise both legs 10 times (2).



Exercise 3

This one is commonly known as the 'Swiss knife'. Lie flat on the floor on your back with your arms above your head (1). Now raise your feet and head at the same time and touch your toes (2), 10 times.



Exercise 4

Lie on the floor on your side (1) and gently raise the head and legs towards each other, making sure you twist the body at the same time (2). Ten times on each side.