

Desert Classic Duathlon Pre-Race Lowdown

By Brian Grasky - USAT Level II Triathlon Coach

Welcome to the beautiful—and tough—Desert Classic Duathlon! I've done this race many times, including a top-10 pro finish, so here's the scoop...

The race starts with a roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ mile mild descent on pavement, so there's an opportunity to start out really fast and go anaerobic—be sure to warm up well! You'll then make a sharp left turn onto single track trail. Slow down at the corner so you don't slide out, then get ready for the 1.5 mile slight climb on smooth, rolling trails. If you're a strong trail runner you'll want a good position going onto the trail section so work early to get it. If you're a weaker trail runner, it's best to hold back a bit and avoid the possibility of getting nudged into a cactus on the trail. The aid station is the top of the loop, at which you'll begin the slight rolling descent to T1. Faster runners will maintain speed on this section, but remember you have the tough bike ride up next, so don't overdo it. This first run is deceptively tough—conserve for the rest of the 1:30-3hr race. Many go too fast here and doing that makes the rest of the race hurt! Exiting the trail at the same place you entered, take a sharp right and then a U-turn into transition a few dozen yards later. Congrats. 3.5 miles done.

Grab your bike and helmet and exit out the other end of transition. Watch for the mount line! The transition exit is slightly downhill, but is followed quickly by a sweeping right turn leading to a sharp 90 right at the bottom of the hill—watch out for spectators and gravel. You don't want to slide out this early and on this chipseal pavement.

The 21 mile bike feels like a full 40k. It starts with a 2-mile long climb once out of the transition area. The slope is such you'll want a moderately low gear and will be in the small chain ring. At the top, accelerate to speed and get in position for a 3-mile long fast descent. You'll drop quite a bit and at a good clip, but the pavement is not all that smooth, so stay on top of the speed and be close to your brakes. At the bottom of the descent you'll take a 90 degree left turn and there may be gravel at the turn. Also watch for traffic—the intersection will be controlled, but keep your eyes out and your brakes ready. Once on McDowell Mountain Road, you'll find the pavement beautiful and the hills short but tough. I recommend going out at an effort of 85-90% of what you think you can go. After 3 more miles, the road will sweep right into yet another descent. One mile down the descent, you'll turn around and begin the journey back up. The bad thing about 6 miles of descending is, well, 6 miles of climbing. At this point you'll be glad you held back a bit on the first half. The route is an exact reverse of the first half, with the toughest part being the climb after the right turn into McDowell Mountain Park. If you climb tough and then rest the 2 mile descent into T2 your quads will be so flooded with lactic acid that run 2 will HURT! I recommend easing off a slight bit at the top of the climb and begin to spin the legs out, then pedal easy periodically on the descent to flush out that lactic acid. The left turn onto the road leading to T2 is where the starting line was previously, and it comes quickly so watch out! At that left turn you have roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ mile before the dismount line.

Find your rack, drop off the bike and helmet and go out the same way you went out on the bike. This is where you'll be happy you spun out your legs on the descent.

Run #2 is only 2.7 miles, but feels like 5. It starts out on the same slight descent as the bike, then makes a left turn onto a gravel road. This road is down hill, but can be deep gravel and can zap your energy so look for the smoothest line to run. About ½ mile into the run you'll reach the campground and the aid station. At the campground you'll go right onto a fun, twisty, rolling, off-road single track. You'll want trail shoes on this section, especially if you have ankle trouble. Keep your eyes out—the trail is well marked, but some have gotten lost (those who don't watch the trail). Another half mile or so you'll hit the campground again, this time skirting it but staying on the trail. As you continue, there's a large hill on your left and you'll be heading toward a wash (dry river). Really keep your eyes out here as the trail gets tough to follow. You'll drop into the wash and follow the trail left to a steep climb up the hill. Unless you're an amazingly strong runner, you'll want to walk or shuffle this climb. The wave behind you may be catching up, so let the faster runners pass. Watch the descent—it's rough, loose, and rocky—but is a lot of fun, too! At the base of the climb follow the trail to the campground again, flow right past the aid station and back up the road. Remember how the gravel road zapped you on the way down? Well, there's nothing between you and the finish line but a slight bit over ½ mile and this road, so use what energy is left and crush the last climb! Once you reach the pavement, go right and around the final turn to the finish!

Congratulations! You just completed one of the toughest and best races on the planet! I'll be there on race day, so come find me and ask any questions.



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