



# Guy Leech

the fittest 40 year old on the planet

## Ultra-FIT Go One-on-One with One of the Fittest Men on the Planet

A wise man once said, 'make pain your friend'. This sentiment is often floated in fitness circles when extra effort is needed or when someone needs to dig deep to pull out something extraordinary in terms of physical performance, usually when the body is baulking at going any further. Some of us experience this pain barrier every so often, some of us never.

Guy Leech is a man who has made friends with pain. Good friends. His chosen sports gave him little choice. Perhaps the fittest athlete Australia has ever produced, his sporting career is simply extraordinary. The success he has achieved in ironman and marathon swimming (and almost everything related) is a testament to his hard work, commitment and self-sacrifice. Guy has now channelled his energy into his business which, surprise, surprise, has a lot to do with the water.

Everything else aside, Guy Leech is a bloody fantastic bloke. All the success in the world doesn't stop him from saying hi in the street or stopping for a chat. And chat he does to Ultra-FIT Editor, Shane Bilsborough...

You won the Australian Ironman a whopping seven times! Is it satisfying to look back and know you had what it took time and time again?

It's definitely a great feeling to look back at my sporting career. It seems a lifetime ago that I achieved those things. Because I'm at a different phase of my life now, I wonder how I put myself through such pain back then. I was possessed with a massive will to be the very best at what I did.

All modesty aside, how much hard work went into your training for those events?

The workload that went into ironman races and the other events I competed in was huge. You had to train in four different disciplines and, to be the best, you needed to have little or no weakness in any of them. At the time, it was a full-time job that involved not only training, but getting to sleep on time, eating correctly and always having the right mental attitude.

What kept you going when your body told you that you were in pain?

I taught myself to almost enjoy pain, and to never show discomfort. I knew if I was hurting, my competitors would probably be hurting more. There was definitely a lot of pain involved in racing at the top level, particularly in the long-distance races like Coolangatta Gold, where you had to absorb plenty of discomfort to win. Leading into a big endurance race, my strategy was always to have my head right. This meant accepting the fact that to win you had to knuckle down and be willing to push through pain and be happy to deal with it over a period of time.

You've been described as the fittest man on the planet. How fit were you and can you elaborate on some of the intense training you did?

I was always very proud and protective of the notion of being fitter than other sportsmen. When I got the chance to compete against other elite athletes, I jumped at it. Channel 9's 60 Minutes program had a segment about a 2-day event comprising 10 events organised by the Institute of Sport in Canberra. The idea was to test a number of top athletes from an array of different sports. The challenge covered strength, endurance, power, speed and cross-training capacity. I was fortunate enough to compete and take out that competition.

My training was always based on trying to 'win' the training session, just as I would try to win the actual race. If I could dominate a training session with a great group of athletes, it gave me a strong belief in my own ability. I needed to know that I was giving my all in training and that the session was beneficial to my overall plan of being the best in the world at what I did.

Out of your wins, which one stands out?

It would have to be the first Coolangatta Gold victory in 1984. It was the first ever professional ironman event in the world and it launched the ironman sport onto the national scene. The media machine behind the movie was massive and 250,000 people were there on the Gold Coast to witness my victory. It was a surreal experience and one I'll never forget.

How far is a marathon swim?

The swim in 1983 was over 24km in Manly Dam. This was possibly the hardest race I've ever competed in. It was only swimming, no other legs, so my muscles never got a break, like they do in ironman racing when you change muscle groups. For days after the event, I couldn't raise my hands above my shoulders. But it was worth it for the title.

Is Guy Leech naturally talented or was it hard work... or both?

Gees, I'd like to say I'm a talented freak of nature, but I don't think that's the case. I am very disciplined, motivated and single-minded person who has always wanted to be the best at whatever I've taken on.

Do you like early mornings?

I don't enjoy the alarm going off on cold, winter mornings. But I love it as soon as I'm on the water getting fit with my paddling team, most of whom are now good friends. We have a great camaraderie and all feel very satisfied after a hard workout. It's a very satisfying way to start each weekday morning.

Tell us about your company, OzPaddle.

OzPaddle is fast becoming a national paddling business that provides everything for the paddler - tuition, training groups, kayak hire and sales, school programs, corporate days, paddling tours and women's classes. The idea is to provide everything possible for people who want to get into paddling or who already do it.

(For more information, visit [www.ozpaddle.com](http://www.ozpaddle.com)).

How was Survivor and how did the hunger fit in with the intense nature of the challenges?

Survivor was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I'd always been a big fan of the series, so when I was offered a place in the game, naturally I jumped at it. Survivor was really tough and the lack of food made the whole experience very draining. I was pretty much hungry all the time, which affects every part of the day. We all lacked energy, making it difficult to compete each day for the rewards and to stay in the competition, but I still loved the competition and relished the chance to put it all on the line.

What else are you up to?

I am very passionate about Australia and the health of our population. In a country so blessed with our climate and resources, plus the innate love of sport that we have, I can't believe there is such a disturbing trend toward obesity and poor health. I've just set up Guy Leech World of Fitness, a company that partners with the best and most innovative companies in their respective health and fitness fields, and together we're going to do our part to make this the Fit Country, rather than the Fat Country.

Alpha One is another leading company that provides Fitness, Health and Safety programs. They're backed by an extraordinary amount of expertise in medicine, nutrition, physio, etc, which complements my fitness/health knowledge base. Together we've developed the best online training program that I've seen anywhere in the world. We're now calling this Guy Leech's Online Personal Trainer. I'm also teaming with Elite Fitness Equipment to come up with a premium, yet affordable, range of branded fitness equipment. I'm also working with Brooks,

which is exciting because they manufacture a superior footwear product and also support the community by encouraging people to get into fun run events.

Other than that, I still train up to 200 people a week through my training groups on Sydney Harbour, and provide fitness training for athletes like Layne Beachley, Kerri Pottharst and the Manly Rugby League team. When I have a spare moment, I hang out with my family at my café on Manly Harbour.

Are you still fit these days?

I train every day, but these days I train for life and not for peak competition. I'm very fit and still have the competitive fire in my belly. I do compete at times, but usually in team events with the people I train with and I keep it as fun as it can be. My weight hasn't really changed from when I was 21, training 4-5 hours a day.

I've found that training with paddling, soft sand running and bodyweight exercises gives your body a great physique. I complement this with the odd weight session.

By being mindful of what I put into my body, I can keep the fat levels down and keep my body fat under 10%. Mind you, I'm not a prisoner to my diet, I just deal with it in a common sense way.

Out of all the accolades you've received, which one stands out?

At the same time as the 'Fittest Athlete on the Planet' tag was being bandied about by a few in the media, a number of my fellow competitors would say that the rest of the field was racing for second behind me, which is the highest accolade you can get. It was a special phase in my career, where I felt close to invincible in competition. I felt I had a clear physical and mental edge over the other guys. This respect from my peers and mates meant a lot to me.

These days I get just as big a buzz out of being called a great husband and dad by my family, or a motivating trainer by my fitness groups, or just a good mate by my friends.

