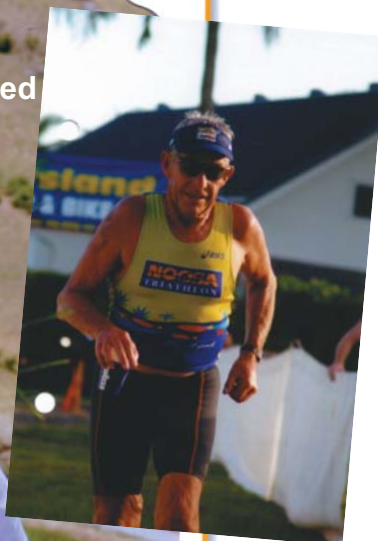


“It was only the fitness and endurance I had built up through triathlon that enabled me to live through the surgery”



People use aches and pains as an excuse, but it is true that you ‘use it or lose it.’

Noel climbing the Alpe d’Huize in France



through the rehabilitation.”

Over his life, Noel has always played sport, starting with rugby, moving onto badminton, squash, scuba diving and water skiing with his family. When he retired from his trade as a plumber/drainlayer 10 years ago, Noel jumped on his bike – literally. “I decided I wanted to keep playing sports. People my age are usually sensible and take up golf or bowls, but I didn’t feel old enough for that, just yet. So in the late ‘80s I started cycling around the streets of Pukekohe and went from there to duathlon. In the late 90s I started swimming and got involved with triathlon, mainly in Auckland and

locally, but also twice a year at Mt Maunganui and in Rarotonga every year since 2001. I’ve been competing in the Olympic, or standard distances until now – 1 ½ km swim, 40km bike ride and 10km run. From now on, I’m competing in sprint distance, which is ½ the distances of Olympic and go for team events where I can stick to the cycling and swimming – the run is getting too much. Just as I have been stepping up since starting duathlon, I’m now stepping down, but I’m not giving up – it will be swimming and biking from now on”

Noel has an impressive display of medals, from the Rarotonga International Triathlon, Noosa, the Gold Coast 10km and the Milford-Takapuna Beach swim. “Of all the sports I’ve done over the years, triathlon is the one that has given me more than any of the others. I’ve made friendships that will stay with me forever. It was the camaraderie and encouragement that motivated me through the difficult process of regaining fitness after the surgery, as well as the support of my wife Betty. Triathlon has so much to offer people of all ages.” Noel has also enjoyed five trips with friends to watch the Tour de France, with a cycling tour of the countryside – “a fantastic experience, seeing things you wouldn’t see from a car.”

Training is ongoing for Noel, to prepare for races like the upcoming Noosa event in November and Stroke and Stride in Auckland in October, – but also as a continuing fitness programme. He works out for upper body strength twice a week in the gym, then swims or cycles. While there are athletes older than Noel, there were only four competing in his age group at Noosa, out of 5,000 athletes from Australia and New Zealand.

“There is no reason why you can’t recover from a triple bypass, with doctor’s okay, by having a fitness regime. You can’t let things like that get on top of you. You have to be determined. A lot of youngsters just waste their time. People use aches and pains as an excuse, but it is true that you ‘use it or lose it.’ I’ve avoided a knee replacement after wrecking my knee when I was 19 by keeping going with sports. You have only one shot at life. You have to get on with it.” ■

Triathlon saved Noel’s life

“You only have one shot at life. You have to get on with it.”

Noel White of Pukekohe is in no doubt – he would not be alive today if it wasn’t for the fitness gained through years of training and competing in duathlons and triathlons.

The 72 year old loves his sport. He is an inspiration to athletes of all ages and living proof of the value of keeping fit. Noel was rushed into urgent surgery for a triple bypass in 2007, but less than a year later, was fronting up in Noosa to compete in the Noosa Tri Festival. The year before he had finished second at Noosa in his age group. After the surgery, he was a little slower, but still picked up a third placing. “I had no idea I had heart problems,” recalls Noel. “I felt something while swimming and thought it was a reaction to the cold water. Cardiologists didn’t pick it up until I was given an angioplasty – then it was straight into urgent surgery. The doctor told me that it was only the fitness and endurance I had built up through triathlon that enabled me to live through the surgery and bounce back so well