

[Tough Mudder Toronto - The event recap](#)

The term epic comes to mind in trying to sum up the Tough Mudder event. On August 18th I was lucky enough to be a part of an amazing team of people who completed the Tough Mudder Toronto event at Mount St. Louis.

There was no shortage of people there (19000 participants altogether) and the levels of athleticism were varied, but the one thing that stood above all was that we were all one. One goal, one team, one day, one purpose. Nobody was there alone, whether they came as a single entrant or not, we all did this together.

This is not a race, this is an event. You don't win; you succeed.

We climbed over the 8 foot wall and into the starting gate at 8:20 AM on a cool but sunny Saturday. After getting up and out of the house at 5 AM to get up to the site we were still reeling from the anticipation as the Tough Mudder emcee/motivator began to fire up the crowd and we were released at 8:30.

As much as you can mentally prepare, we couldn't fully understand what we were facing. But one thing we knew was that we were as ready as we could ever be. The first hill immediately started to eat into the legs and it was a quick reminder that this was not just a flat land race. We had 16 km of intensity ahead of us.

First up, the Arctic Enema. A 5 foot deep pool of ice water. Not cold water...ice water. Not only did you have to get into the ice bath and wade through, but you had to submerge fully underneath a board. While we had already been entirely covered in mud from crawling under barbed wire for 20 feet, this took care of cleaning us off quite a bit. Everyone was watching, cheering, motivating and we got our first taste of team camaraderie right away. This was going to be an adventure.

Throughout the 16 km course there were 6 ascents up blue and black diamond ski runs all totalled along with lots of cross-country style running. The running was not as difficult as most of us had thought because it was never massive durations at high pace, but the trade off was that it was punctuated by intense strength challenges and muscle burning ascents and descents that would test your body and your mind.

Every essence of yourself was going to be put to the test here. Claustrophobic tunnels, ice water, deep mud-water submersion, climbing under barbed wire, dirt ditches, logs and then up and over everything from 10 foot walls to 15 foot rope fences. If you weren't already testing your height limits, the 12 foot jump into a pool of mud water rounded out that skill for you. Nothing seems high until you stand up there and look into the brown pool below knowing there was only one way down.

I learned a lot about myself, and a lot about my team. We were 9 people who had actually never had a chance to train together. We were different in so many ways, but out there on that course we were one. Each of us had to overcome something along that route, and whether we were prepared for it or not, we fought through. I could write a page on the incredible work we all did at each obstacle. It goes without saying that each was a personal test, and a barrier that we each refused to succumb to.

The final few obstacles could not have been more appropriate. Log Jamming: Have you ever carried a 15 foot long tree trunk up a ski run and back down? Neither have we; until that day. But when faced with the challenge, our team was like a choreographed troop as we switched in and out to take

turns at each point of the wooden beast. In only half a day we have learned where each of us was best to be in order to maximize our strengths and support each other when we needed it. This was a test. We passed with flying colours.

Next obstacle was named Everest. An impressive and daunting looking 18 foot tall quarter-pipe. We had our first team member surprise us, and even himself by tearing down that hill in a full sprint and he launched himself up that monster and climbed over. It wasn't just watching him leap to successfully overcoming the wall that made it awesome, it was the fact the first thing he did was turn around and lean back over reaching his hand for the next runner.

One by one we ran with every ounce of strength and leapt with faith at the hands of the waiting team members at the top. We were one. Nobody would be left behind here. It took some of us more than one attempt to make it up there. But even the crash of your body as you reached for the ridge and just watched it slip out of your fingers, would not make any of us give up.

One more hill. It was steep to the eyes and to the body. The angle was so massive at points that some even had to lean with hands on the hill to stay upright and not slip and crash out. Every part of your body was screaming at you to stop but the cheers and encouragement from fellow Mudders and from our team gave us each the strength we needed to come over the top and begin the beautiful descent into the finish line.

We couldn't have known what it was going to be like, but there it was; the final test. 40 feet away you could see the finish line, but in the way was the great unknown. A 20 foot long mud pit with water, mud, ruts and ridges. Running through this was going to be hard enough. Just to negotiate the uneven ground and not tear your ankle off was tough enough after 16 km of running.

That is when you start to come to the harsh realization that the hundreds of wires dangling from 10 feet overhead down to inches from the water and mud were pulsing with body halting voltage. 10,000 volts to be exact. It was impossible for us to know what it was about to be like, but it was named Electroshock Therapy for a reason. All that we knew was that as we held each other's hands for one last rally cry, we separated and launched with every bit of speed each of us had to face adversity with everything we had.

As I pushed through the first few feet I hoped that I would escape the pulsing as much as possible, and when the first one struck I immediately became aware of how difficult this was going to be. It shot through my entire body with every single muscle clenching like a taser attack for a full second. It was actually only about a fifth of a second in real-time, but now everything was moving like it was slow motion. I couldn't even reconcile what had happened and then the second one struck. I pushed forward with everything I had and watched my team mates as each of us faced our own personal hell for what felt like an eternity.

The third pulse struck, and then immediately after the fourth jolt surged through me and sent me to the ground. It was like watching a movie from inside. For a moment I looked through to see another 10 feet ahead of me of mud and wires. I launched myself up and was stunned again with another massive pulse. Pushing through, I stopped trying to avoid the wires because it was futile. There was only one way out and it had to be done by putting everything aside and going beyond your limits. For a moment, it really felt like it couldn't be done. But inside my soul there was no option to quit. We had to get to that line.

There were too many of us to go all through together, so we had 6 go through and then 3 followed a few seconds after. The first group looked back and everything inside us wanted to celebrate but all we did was look back to find our teammates. It wasn't about individual achievement. We would not

cross the line without being together.

Two team members had hit the ground hard and were almost stuck in there being ravaged by the electric attack and fighting the muddy terrain to try to muscle through. They fought hard and it was amazing to watch. We must have all had that look as we came through. It was almost unreal to watch as it happened. Watching each person come through that obstacle and clearing the wires was like a personal victory for everyone.

Three and a half hours after we had begun, we crossed the line together with arms raised. We are one. We are Tough Mudder. See you there in 2013.



[Tough Mudder Time!](#)

Some time in the fall of last 2011 I was shown an event by a colleague at work. The email subject was something along the lines of "this is nuts...we should try it". My response was similarly comical. "This is crazy. I'm game".

There are a few moments in your life that you will see something that is beyond what you imagine you can do. The adventure comes when you share that thought with someone. It's not that I wish that I hadn't said that I would join into the event. I suppose there is not much of a better way to commit to a massive personal and team physical challenge.

The event is called Tough Mudder. For those who aren't familiar, here is a little video which shows you what it's all about.

Scared? I am. But any trepidation that I have about it is removed by the excitement of the challenge ahead, and the beginnings of a really great team of people to go through the experience with.

I will be updating along the way as we get closer to the event. Most importantly I will be working with a charitable organization to fund raise throughout training, up to and during the event. It's my firm belief that I am lucky to be able to participate in such an exciting event, so I would like do whatever I can to inspire others, and to raise awareness about physical activity and its benefit to everyone.

Because my primary sport is cycling this is a big departure from anything I have ever done. I am going to work as hard as possible so that I can step up to the task and help my team members as we tough it out through this gruelling, yet exciting event. It's going to be an adventure!

Don't lose weight, gain fitness

✘ It's spring time and with summer fast approaching many people are getting into the weight loss state of mind. A typical situation at the beginning of each year is that a number of people who are nicknamed "The Resolutioners" will become aggressive with trying to lose weight based on a New Year's resolution.

If you were to open the financials up for any local gym in your neighbourhood you would probably see a massive increase in membership and attendance in January and February, and then as March comes around it will trail off quite a bit. This is unfortunate, because a lot of people become target oriented against what they don't realize can be an unreachable target. It's not that weight loss is an unreachable target, but basing your entire goal simply around your weight on a scale can be frustrating.

Speaking from experience, I have found that the best way to reach your overall health goal of weight loss is to put away the idea that you have to lose weight every day or few days. To simplify, you shouldn't aim to lose weight, but to gain fitness.

By increasing your fitness levels you will find it has a positive side effect of triggering weight loss. Personal trainers have shared their success stories from clients and what you see time and time again is that a well rounded fitness regimen, coupled with a modified diet will have the greatest effect on your overall health.

And don't let the phrase "modified diet" scare you. It's not necessary to eat nothing but salads and drink water to reach your weight loss goal. While it's important to reduce the intake of high-fat foods, you are better off to target a balanced plan rather than an unrealistic plan that you can't stick to in the longer term.

At one point, not too many years ago, I weighed 195 pounds. That may not seem like much, but it was well over where I should have been for optimal health. I chose to add fitness into my weekly routine and to gently modify my eating habits over the course of the first quarter of the year and as a result I was able to drop 30 pounds in 3 months.

✘ Now I'm not saying that everyone can and will achieve that sort of result. I worked very hard to reach my fitness goal, and during that journey my weight dropped drastically and became stabilized at the level that is appropriate for my body type.

An important lesson which should be learned early, is that many of the fad diet products, cleansing plans and various "burn fat faster" products are not effective. Not only that, but they are really only going to be useful in addition to an aggressive diet and exercise plan.

I encourage you to seek the help of a trainer, and to find a community of people with similar goals who will help you to drive towards a realistic and reachable fitness goal. It is an amazing feeling to get there, and once you are there it is much easier to stay there.

I'll close with this brief scene from a really great documentary named Bigger, Stronger, Faster (<http://www.biggerstrongerfastermovie.com/>) where the film's director and writer Chris Bell speaks with a fitness model who represents Hydroxycut. Watch for yourself and you will get an idea of just what it means to rely solely on taking a pill to get into shape.

Cycling and the Ontario Highway Traffic Act

I am a cyclist. It's a simple statement, but you have to understand what it means. I fully support the cycling community by being a law abiding cyclist. That's probably an oxymoron based on what I see on an almost daily basis.



Why underline cycling? The true cycling community is one that supports cycle commuting, recreational cycling, trail usage, amateur and professional racing and along with supporting the riders and organizers of events, we also support drivers, pedestrians and the lawmakers and law enforcement staff who provide safety in a potentially dangerous environment.

While it is admirable for people to cycle to work, or recreationally, it is also a requirement to understand and abide by the simple and easily to understand laws. I fully believe that we should require a licensing system for bicyclists because the entry criteria of "has a bike" isn't enough.

It is of absolute importance that you as a cyclist, and as a driver, fully understand the Highway Traffic Act and how cycling and the law come into play on our Ontario roads. Far too many times I see cyclists and drivers making horrible, dangerous and illegal decisions and it's really infuriating that the standard is set so low for some people.

First assignment: Read this!

<http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/pubs/cycling-guide/section5.0.shtml>

A large number of cyclists do these things far too often:

- Run red lights
- Pass cars on the right
- Pass between car lanes to advance position in traffic
- Jump onto the sidewalk to avoid cars

It is very simple. DON'T DO THESE THINGS! If you were on a Motorcycle you would be fully able to do the same moves based on your size and agility yet that seems silly doesn't it?

Hey I can fit so I must be able to ride here

The Toronto Star recently did a great article chronicling the cyclists who breezed through the red light over the course of an hour at a very busy intersection. The result was frightening.

<http://www.thestar.com/news/crime/article/1013091-police-launch-crackdown-on-cyclists-who-don-t-stop>

Hey I get it. The world won't change. There will always be massive numbers of lawless and careless cyclists who ruin it for me and the rest of the proper cyclists out there. Just please do me the favour of not harbouring your anger for hours and then taking it out on me by whipping your steaming hot coffee at me just because I'm on a bike and you can reach me.

I was even pulled over by an off-duty police officer who said that I should not be on the road and that I was "supposed to be on the sidewalk because it was not safe for the cars for me to be on the road". Can someone please tell me how the safety of a person inside a 2000 pound rolling piece of steel armour needs to be protected from a 160 pound guy in spandex riding an 18 pound bicycle?

In this case I asked the fellow to tell me exactly what part of the Highway Traffic Act said that would back up his completely incorrect understanding of the law and safety. So if that unaware gentleman is reading this I'll help him and everyone else here out with this simple excerpt from the HTA:

HTA 147 - Slow moving traffic travel on right side - any vehicle moving slower than the normal traffic speed should drive in the right-hand lane, or as close as practicable to the right edge of the road except when preparing to turn left or when passing another vehicle. ***For cyclists, you must ride far enough out from the curb to maintain a straight line, clear of sewer grates, debris, potholes, and parked car doors. You may occupy any part of a lane when your safety warrants it. Never compromise your safety for the convenience of a motorist behind you.*** Set fine: \$85.00

So let's read through that and understand that the safety of the cyclist is the priority and the "convenience of a motorist behind you" is not. Don't take this as an invitation to ride at a turtle's pace and use up the entire lane just to irk the driver behind you. When I'm rolling along our roads it is at a speed between 30-60 kph so if the simpleton behind me who thinks that he can wipe me out like some character in Grand Theft Auto. This is the real world where when you give me a little nudge with your car it has a real and devastating effect.

At this point I just try to have enough faith and hope that my family, friends and fellow cyclists can enjoy our sport and our lifestyle safely among the cars and pedestrians. Know the law. Ride safe. Keep the rubber on the road.