

THE MEN AND WOMEN OF MUSSEL: 10 YEARS LATER, REFLECTIONS
WRITTEN BY CHRISTOPHER HENDERSON FOR THE MUSSELMAN TRIATHLON, 2013
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When Jeff Henderson set out to create a triathlon in the Finger Lakes in 2004, a fair amount of uncertainty existed. Henderson, a former professional triathlete, had raced in many multisport events, but had yet to direct his own. There were questions about whether an venue outside of a major metropolitan area could sustain an event like the one Henderson envisioned – and whether a community as small as Geneva could wield the volunteers that would be needed. Still, as someone who had grown up vacationing on Seneca Lake, Henderson was determined to bring a top-tier triathlon to the Finger Lakes region.

The inaugural event was held July 11, 2004 and attracted 508 triathletes – an impressive number for a brand new race. Some triathletes decided to try the race after reading a series of articles Henderson was writing about starting a triathlon from scratch on popular multisport website Slowtwitch.com. Others were attracted by the opportunity to race the half-Iron distance race (a 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike, and 13.1-mile run) in the beautiful Finger Lakes region. Whatever their reasons, they came, and that initial race was widely viewed as a successful launch.

Many triathlons experience slow growth in their first few years, but the Musselman would nearly double in size in 2005, with 989 athletes registered for the second-annual race. Over the years, in fact, the event would experience growth every single year.

In 2006, the third edition of the race, it would top one thousand contestants for the first time. Henderson introduced a new category that year: the Aquabike – the equivalent of the half-Iron swim and bike, minus the run – at the request of many triathletes with knee problems. All four races together would bring a total of 1038 triathletes to Geneva.

In 2007 the event would see a total of 1,258 triathletes participate. That year organizers introduced the DoubleMussel – a category for athletes choosing to compete in both the mini-Mussel on Saturday and the Musselman on Sunday, a grueling 88.8 miles of racing over the two days. In its first year a tentative group of only 25 athletes would dare to go the DoubleMussel distance; this category would grow as quickly as the others, however.

Each race would continue to fill to capacity earlier and earlier in subsequent years. In 2008, the race began receiving national media attention. *Inside Triathlon* magazine would name it an ‘Editor’s Pick’ in January of 2008, and four months later *Bicycling* magazine would call it a ‘Must-Do Race’. In March 2009 *Triathlete Magazine* would name the Musselman one of its Top 100 triathlons – and the ‘Most Family-Friendly’ race in the United States.

In 2012 participants totaled 2,141 entrants: 942 in the Musselman, 887 in the mini-Mussel, 102 in the Double Mussel, 48 in the Aquabike, and 162 in the MusselKids race.

Race director Jeff Henderson expects the race to continue to grow over the next ten years. He credits the dedication of the organizing committee with a lot of the race's success, and acknowledges that it would not have grown so quickly if not for the involvement of the community.

"I hear positive feedback from triathletes after race weekend every year," says Henderson. "One of the things that I hear the most is that people can't get over how involved this community is – it's the people out on the course handing out water, hosing triathletes down from the heat, and playing music along the run course that keep athletes coming back year after year."

The Men and Women of Mussel 10 Years Later – Reflections on the Musselman Triathlon

BY: CD HENDERSON

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