

By SERWYN LEWIS

IRON men don't rust. Iron men are so tough they're called "animals". Iron men punch through pain like a wet paper bag. But this weekend iron men are nervous.

Tomorrow at the final round of the Nutri-Grain Iron Man Grand Prix Series, at Manly, NSW, the extraordinary fitness and proficiency of Australia's most glamorous lifesavers will be on display.

At 8am they blast off on a grueling 42.195km race with a total value of prizes exceeding \$90,000 — the deciding event of a series of bust or rust iron man events at Queensland's Gold Coast, Cronulla and North Bondi, NSW, Glenelg, SA, Scarborough, WA, and South Melbourne, Victoria.

For the first time the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA) has combined with commercial sponsors to present this multi-discipline marathon endurance event formerly held on the Gold Coast and now billed as "The Greatest Show on Surf" — the latest sporting circuit spectacle in Australia this summer.

Taking an estimated four hours the race will separate the real iron men from the beach boys in a pain-busting, seven-leg race consisting of a beach run (0.195km), surf ski from Manly to Collaroy (11.5km), return beach run to Collaroy (4.5km), surf ski to Shelly Beach (12km), ocean swim via Queenscliff to Manly (3.5km), beach run to Queenscliff and return to Manly (3km), Malibu board paddle via Shelly Beach to Queenscliff and return to Manly (4.5km) and a final beach run to Queenscliff and return (3km).

Competitors — or "animals" in the jargon of veteran swimming coach Harry Gallagher who now trains iron men — will have put in at least 10 months' hard work for this event. The day starts with the 5am "yawn patrol" — usually a three-hour water torture training session — more time in the "animal lane" at the pool while most people are having lunch, and a two-hour sprint at sunset, as well as daily track and weights work.

Hot favourites for the race are Guy "Leechie" Leech (Manly) and Darren Mercer (Thirroul, NSW). Hot on their heels are Craig "Riddo" Riddington (Manly), Barry Newman (Freshwater, NSW) and Dwayne Thuys (Seacliff, SA).

To win the series Leech must beat Mercer who is four points clear. In the six races of the series so far, Leech has won two, was placed second in three and did not compete in the other. Mercer has won four, with a second and a third.

Other giants in this battle to rule the waves are Grant Kenny (Alexandra Headlands, Qld), Barry Kelly (1984 Olympic kayak bronze medalist, Byron Bay) and Oscar Chalupsky (from West Germany, Manly club member).

The history of the race began in January 1984 with the first Marathon Iron Man event, the Coolangatta Gold, staged for the filming of aerial shots for the Michael Edgley movie, *Coolangatta Gold*.

The event was a great success and the following year another Coolangatta Gold was held.

In 1986 the SLSAA assumed the rights to the race, fusing gold and iron into a seven-race series held in five States. With commercial sponsorship the Iron Man series took off.

One third of the prize money in Grand Prix events goes to the winner's surf life saving club to pay for life saving equipment and facilities. Club membership and life saving proficiency are prerequisites for entry in the series which decides who is the finest endurance iron man and lifesaver in Australia, if not the world.

Guy Leech proved he was a lifesaver first and an iron man second last weekend when he saved the life of a middle-aged man swept 500m out to sea from Sydney's Narrabeen Beach by a savage rip. Training for this weekend's event, Leech was on the running leg of the marathon when he saw the man.

"He was a gonner," Leech said. "I swam out to him, held him up while we drifted across the rip and then caught the break back to the beach."

While they add glamour and prestige to surf lifesaving, iron men pay a price. They lead spartan lives and the cost of training fees, equipment, such as new boards and skis, air fares and accommodation to attend races all come out of their own pockets. It is estimated that a top professional needs more than \$20,000 a year which the lucky ones pick up from commercial sponsors, groups and their families.

So why do they do it? Most of the "animals" we asked found it hard to tell us their motives, but the general consensus was they do it to win — and because they can't resist taking up the challenge.

But Gallagher-trained swimmers Barry Newman, 23, and Guy Leech, 22, are two animals who don't mind talking about it.

"It's exciting and there's a bit of money going now," said the blond, nuggety Newman. "You can almost make a living out of it if you're good. If you're not in the top five or six you lose money."

He will be glad when the race is over. "We've been training solidly since May," Newman growled as he and Leech surfed at Manly surf club after another grueling training session.

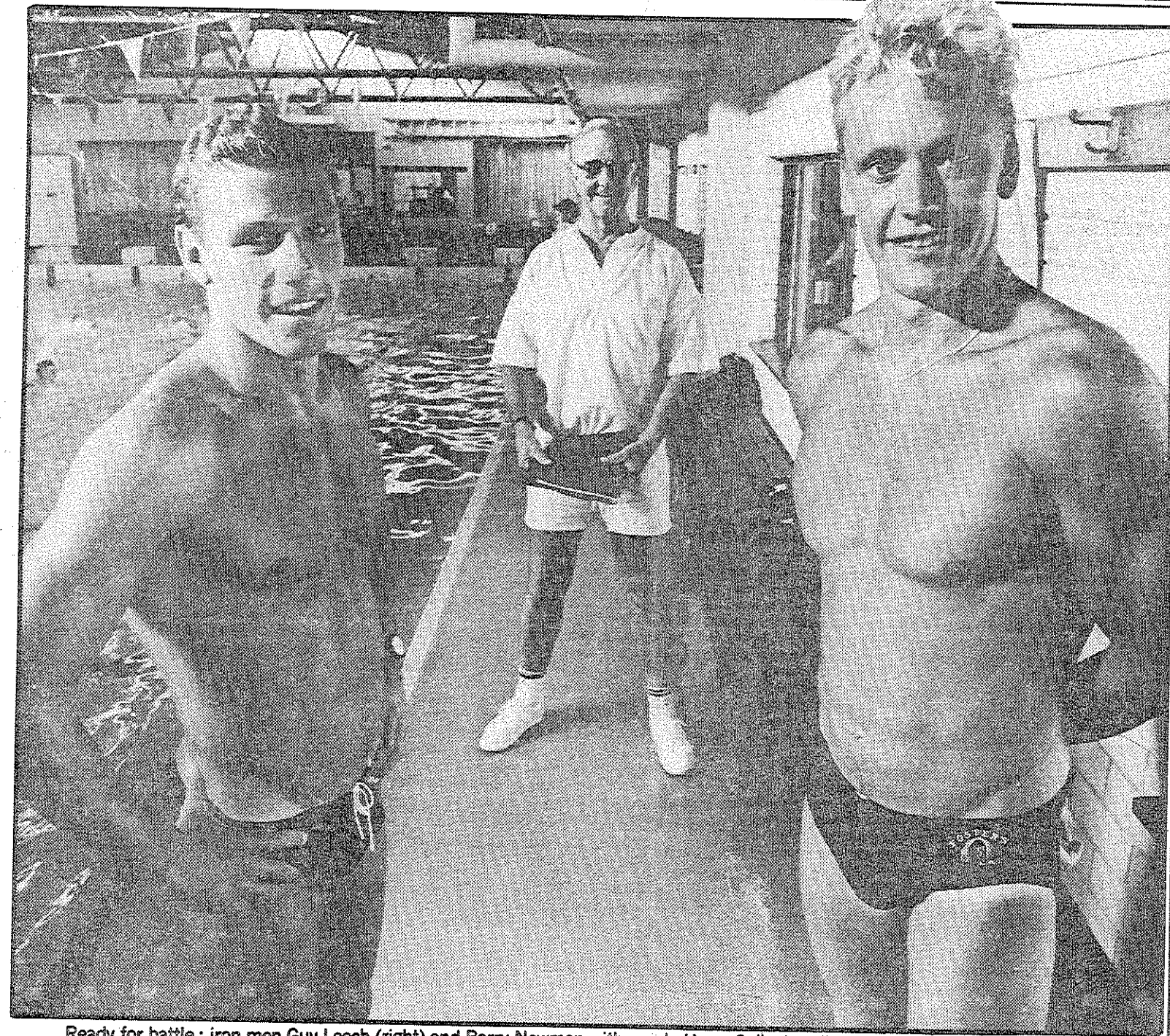
Leech, the el supremo, winner of two Coolangatta golds, a blond, bronzed and blue-eyed surfing "perfection" (perfection in surf slang) is confident.

"I've won every marathon since the start but Darren (Mercer) has shown there's nothing between us. He beat me by one second a few races back. I've got a lot of respect for him," he said.

Leech said the worst part of the race for him was the start. "An hour before the race the adrenalin's pumping. Once I've started I can get down to business."

He was recently screen tested for a \$10 million surf movie in Hollywood. It is believed a sequel will be filmed in Australia.

"They wanted me to take acting lessons but I didn't want to hang around even though the money would have been great," said Leech. For Newman the importance of



Ready for battle: iron men Guy Leech (right) and Barry Newman with coach Harry Gallagher. Picture by COLIN MacPHERSON.

BUST or RUST

There's no gain without pain for surfing's iron men — and women. This weekend the crunch comes...



The pain barrier: Grant Kenny (above) and Guy Leech chase a \$90,000 prize.

the race is an animal fact of life, survival.

"To keep my third placing in the point score in the Grand Prix I have to go well in this race," said Newman, a beach inspector at Freshwater, NSW, who is water born and bred and has trained since the age of four. The most difficult leg of the race for him is the running and swimming.

"You've got your head down in the ocean. You can't see where you're going," he said.

Another fierce competitor, South Australian Dwayne Thuys, 23, has won the Australian Iron Man Championship for the past two years and is current world champion. A handsome hunk, joker and renowned rowdy rascal, this blond Coolangatta Gold veteran remembers how hard and hot the going gets. He has yet to prove himself over endurance distances.

"Your buttocks get numb during the ski paddle. During the swim your shoulders ache. In the run your legs and thighs hurt," said Thuys.

"It's a battle not to give up. You have to remind yourself to hang on even though your arms are screaming," said Thuys, who also admitted to being nervous before the race.

"You have to think about what place you're going to get and not about how much it's going to hurt. The running's the worst part for me."

Unassuming to the point of being shy, Darren Mercer, 19, the first of the animals to beat Guy Leech, believed the ski leg would be hardest.

"Before the race I get nervous but it goes away. It's been a very hard and long season. My father keeps me going. He was a lifesaver and used to get me up in the morning to go training," said the slim and very trim Mercer.

Muscle man and golden boy Grant Kenny, a 1984 Olympic kayak bronze medallist and four-times

Australian Iron Man Champion, does up to three hours kayak work, a 40-minute run and a few hours of gym on an easy day.

"Dad was a lifesaver and I grew up on the beach. I've been competing since I was six. I started training when I was 13. I hope to get away with the leading ski paddlers. I hate running and the board could be my next weakest leg," said Kenny.

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IRON men are not always men — sometimes they are women. But they are still called iron men and compete in the same events as men.

Although no women have made it to this year's Grand Prix, next year it is expected that there will be women competitors.

Since women were admitted to the SLSAA six years ago they have been rapidly making up for their lack of experience, taking out several club iron man championships, particularly in the junior division.

Lisa Hardy, 20 (Elouira, NSW), is a late starter who has competed in three iron man events and lasted the distances at Wanda and North Bondi, NSW, and Scarborough Beach, WA.

"The most difficult part of the race is the ski leg," said the blond, sun-tanned, super-attractive Hardy. "At Scarborough the running was hard because the sand was soft."

"I'm an all-rounder but I feel most at home on a board." She is now training up to six hours a day between working part-time at the State Bank in Sutherland, NSW.

"I joined the surf club when I was about four and I've been there ever since. One year my dad went in the triathlon. I thought if he can do it so can I."

"Next year I'm going in all the iron men events."

SWIM king and veteran coach Harry "Old Fox" Gallagher has trained 24 Olympians including Dawn Fraser and Jon Henricks. Olympic swim team coach in 1966, 1969 and 1968, his sprinters have won nine Olympic gold medals and broken 52 world records.

His recent switch to the iron man lane, a sporting event in its infancy, is an unexpected move in which he has perfected his "pain zone" training theory. He discovered it in 1982 on his 320-mile push from Adelaide to Port Pirie and back in 64 days, a Guinness Book world record which raised thousands of dollars for the Heart Foundation.

"The more you train in the pain zone the fitter you become, the less you feel the pain," said Gallagher who these days cuts a dashing, superbly fit figure despite his 62 years.

His return, he said, was motivated by a pride in being physically superior.

"Everyone's more fitness conscious now and these iron men are the ultimate in physical fitness," said Gallagher.

After living in Canada for 10 years upgrading his coaching skills he returned to Australia in 1984. The same year he was honoured with an appointment to the International Swimming Hall of Fame at Fort Lauderdale, USA. In 1985 he was awarded the OAM (Medal of the Order of Australia) for outstanding contributions to youth and sport.

Since his re-entry into what he calls "the animal lane" his team of iron people triathletes ("animals") have grown from two to 30.

"Of these, 10 are in the top 50 in

Australia and three are in the top 10. By far we have the strongest group. Out of a pack of animals comes the king leader. That person will be the next top iron person," said Gallagher.

He believed iron men events appealed to people who had never been the best at any one sporting discipline.

"They're good all-rounders. They are motivated by very big dollars, wanting to keep themselves fit and gaining recognition."

According to Gallagher "pain zone training" applies to all top achievers, be they sporting or business.

He is currently involved in the international lecture circuit. His topics — winning and success by design, the survival of the fittest brain and the animal lane at arm's length.

Women, he believed, had greater endurance and tolerance to pain.

One of my girls, Perri-Lee Gammie (Freshwater), swam the 13,000m event. I have only one man, Graham Bruce (Manly), who could do that. The top females will be better than 95 per cent of average males. They adapt to training more quickly but they drop out because the dollar inducement and the prestige for them is not there yet."

He is testimony to the fact that old coaches should not be put out to pasture.

"Since 1972 we have won very few medals. The young coaches are making the same mistakes we made when we were young. Meanwhile, other countries are taking advantage of the older coaches' brains and experience."