

Not even a stolen bike could keep Boulder's Lars Finanger from qualifying for the 8th annual Nissan Xterra World Championships. On October 24th, the fastest off-road triathletes in the world will converge upon the beaches of Maui, Hawaii to compete for the coveted title of Xterra World Champion. Finanger will be amongst the 400 athletes on the starting line racing the 1.5k swim, 30k mountain bike, and 11k trail run.

The Xterra Maui course is notorious for its unforgiving terrain and stifling heat. The swim takes place in the Pacific Ocean and consists of two laps of 750 meters with a 150 meter beach sprint between laps. This is followed by a 30k mountain bike on the slopes of the dormant volcano, Haleakala (meaning House of the Sun). The final leg is an 11k trail run over ankle-twisting cobblestone, gnarly gravel, and rock-strewn paths.

For Finanger, qualifying for the championships meant hurdling a major obstacle. Two weeks before the Netherlands qualifying event, Finanger had his mountain bike stolen from the swimming pool he was training at. He was forced to borrow a friend's bike for the race, in order to complete the 30 kilometer biking portion of the course.

"It was difficult," stated Finanger. "For someone over six feet tall like myself to ride a bike belonging to a five and a half foot person made the race tough. But in the end, a bike is a bike."

So Finanger used the smaller framed, borrowed bike and raced over sandy beaches, into fierce headwinds, and over single-track trails lined with thorned bushes.

"I came off the bike with blood dripping from my arms and legs. It was a well fought battle," conceded Finanger who finished second and secured his World's qualifying slot.

The Xterra is the off-road version of triathlon. Competitors give up the luxury of racing in calm lakes and on well-paved roads in exchange for choppy oceans, lung bursting elevation climbs, and quad screaming trail runs.

The Nissan Xterra World Championships is the culmination of a national and international series consisting of 46 qualifying events. Domestic qualifying events take place in Colorado, Virginia, and California while an international tour travels to Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Finanger spent last year teaching at an international school in Brussels, Belgium allowing him to travel to the neighboring Netherlands to compete at Xterra Netherlands.

"Everything in Europe is so close together," states Finanger. "From Brussels to The Hague (Netherlands) was only a two hour drive away. I was back home in time for dinner."

Despite his methodical preparations for the Xterra event, Finanger still lacks a bike of his own.

"I'm in the final stages of purchasing a new bike," says Finanger. That should put me on the right path.