Interview with Melker Larsson, Organizer of Immeln SwimRun

1. What’s your personal background in sports and SwimRun in specific?

I raced in Immeln twice as a teenager, barely knowing how to crawl. I came from orienteering and soccer where I trained really hard in my youth years but lost motivation and had injures when I was around 16. I’ve always trained and had a short period where I did OCR (obstacle course racing). After my first swimrun experiences I had a few years where I didn’t train consistently but rather just enjoyed sessions in the summer where I went on adventures for a few hours with friends. Nowadays I’ve learnt how to swim properly and I’m training more specifically for swimrun and have participated in a few races which has been great fun. I enjoy both the long, casual Sunday adventures and the competitive racing element.

2. Since when are you organising events or SwimRun events, how was the development?

I’ve been part of organizing events since I was a kid. I guess it’s my dads’ genes because he’s always been part of creating sports events in both orienteering and for school kids. I remember planning sports activities in school, taking part in hosting different stations on outdoor days for younger kids or and being part of orienteering competitions. I was part of creating a lot of events during my high school years and I believe I invented a few new ones. I’ve always enjoyed bringing people together and creating something fun that invokes the everyday with some new energy.

I’ve helped out at Immeln Swimrun since the start in 2015. I was 16 at the time so I didn’t do the heavy lifting. I then raced my first swimrun race in Immeln 2017 and then did the long course of 35 km in 2018. After that I stepped in more and took the lead because I felt how amazing this sport is and how amazing this event could become. Every year the event has become better and we’ve learnt so much. I’ve learnt that greatness is achieved together – which is as true for organizing events as it is for doing longer swimrun races.

3. What makes Immeln specific?

The majestic nature and the wilderness. It’s a landscape filled with mythical stories and it’s easy to understand why. The place is very rural and it’s a very friendly community and it’s a very unique race setting. In Immeln, we are racing in nature for nature and we’re trying to inspire participants and visitors with our approaches. We’re focused on creating amazing experiences and memories in ways that benefit both people and planet. For us the sense of community and joy is crucial which is why we focus on having warm, healthy meals served to participants both before and after the race and more than 50 officials along the course cheering you on and keeping you safe when you race.

4. What do you recommend to train in advance ?

Trailrunning. Being comfortable with keeping a high pace through the forest will give you a good advantage and I also recommend you practice your transitions. We have many stages so you can earn or lose a lot of time on the transitions. The shores are very varying so practicing how to go in and out when it’s a sandy beach, a steep forest hill or a rocky bottom is good. While in water, my tip is to lay down as much as possible. This will help where it’s rocky and you will be able to swim longer while being able to see below the surface.

5. How to get their most easily? Any offers for accommodation?

It’s easiest to get to the arena by car and we encourage participants to travel together. We have a sheet where people can sign up and contact each other. There’s multiple cosy options for accommodation in Immeln. We have some offers on our webpage that people can check out.

6. What-’s your personal goal with a 5 years timeline

I hope we can welcome more and more people to Immeln Swimrun each year and that it becomes a big yearly celebration. The sport is maturing and more and more people are trying it out and realising how wonderful it is to be so immersed in nature. If I am allowed to dream I hope to have the race aired on national television and to have big classes of elite swimrunners as well as swimrunners of all ages, from the smallest of children partaking together with their parents to their grandparents sharing these beautiful experiences together.

7 What do you think about the My SwimRun Championships Series?

I think it’s a great way for swimrunners to experience beautiful natural environments and appreciate the great differences that this sport offers. I hope participants see our races as opportunities to experience what each unique location has to offer – even beyond the race itself. The series is also very inclusive which I think is a great development for swimrun. Everyone can be part of racing and competing in the series, no matter if they are casual Sunday-swimrunners or elite. For me swimrun is about the adventure and this series offers a lot of them!

8 What’s your reason to join and what can your input be for the series in general ?

The inclusiveness and the different locations where I know there are great organizers with similar values to us. I think MSC is a good and natural development for the sport and I’m happy to be part of it from the start. I see the series as a garden or forest which is in its infancy. Now it needs nurturing and pollinators (participants) to bloom and become something wonderful.

9. Any new ideas approaches, athletes benefits for your race in 2023?

On our race in Immeln I’m trying to constantly test new ideas. One of our mantras is “Make memories not materials” and we are really focused on the participant experience. We want the experience to be memorable rather than having to impose a memory onto a shirt for example. This year we’re particularly proud to announce the ATOBEE medal which is a wooden medal which is also a bee-hotel for solitary bees – an important pollinator species that it threatened. This is one of our initiatives that we hope both increases the positive impact from the race but also spreads awareness and inspires everyone that comes in contact with the medal.

10. Any other points you want to mention ?