



Pain perks

AS A LONGSTANDING TRADITION, MANY companies reward prized clients and employees with a golf outing or seat at the Super Bowl. Now there's another reward — one that might be called a first-class ticket to misery. The muscle-aching sort of misery beloved by those who would rather play than watch, and for whom golf barely registers as exercise.

Companies are rewarding executives by buying them slots at marathons and triathlons. The value of the slots themselves is only \$200 or so. But these slots come free of the hassle of registration — at major marathons and triathlons, battling through registration checkpoints can leave you longing for the ease of airport security.

That isn't all. The service that provides these slots, CEO Challenges, adds other amenities, such as luxury hotel rooms and dinner ahead of the race with a few professional competitors. On the eve of an event, nothing calms nerves like a few words of reassurance and advice from a real star of the sport. On race morning, CEO Challenges provides a sunrise perk, by securing for its clients an early "wave" — meaning they don't have to sit around for hours waiting to jump in the water and start their race. Another amenity comes at the end of the swim. For the average competitor racing barefoot toward his bike, the sight of five thousand of them induces a bit of panic (Yikes! Which one's mine?) But clients of CEO Challenges can calmly proceed toward a premium spot (with easy in-and-out access) that the firm has secured for them.

The business isn't for everyone. "CEO Challenges is designed for business owners, Presidents and

Endurance trials are the new executive incentive, says Brunswick's KEVIN HELLIKER

FITTEST CEOs
At the 2016 Island House Triathlon in the Bahamas, executives endured three grueling events: swim, bike and run.

- THE WINNERS:**
- 1. Shannon Horn, First Response Fire Rescue - 2:24.20**
(third from right, above)
 - 2. Brent De Jong, Castlake LP - 2:25.55**
(third from the left)
 - 3. Anthony Sullivan, Sullivan Productions / OxiClean - 2:26.26**
(far right)

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C-level executives of companies with at least \$1 million in annual revenue," says a statement from Life Time Fitness, a Minnesota-based operator of health clubs, endurance races and other fitness concerns, including CEO Challenges. "Participants enjoy VIP access and stay in five-star accommodations when available. All arrangements are made with incredible attention to detail, and constant care from CEO Challenges staff."

Marketing executive Ted Kennedy, a lifelong endurance athlete, founded CEO Challenges. "Last year, Microsoft paid to have 35 people receive free weekends at the New York City triathlon," he says.

For Alain Villeneuve, a partner in Chicago at the law firm Vedder Price, the value isn't limited to the amenities CEO Challenges provides. "By joining CEO Challenges, I wind up in a room with other people who share my frustration that I don't perform athletically at the level I could, because I'm either working all the time or having dinner with clients every night," says Villeneuve. Villeneuve once finished an Olympic-distance triathlon in 2:07 — lightning fast for an event encompassing a 1-mile swim, 25-mile bike ride and 6.2-mile run.

CEO Challenges has helped more than 600 executives to the start line. Since Kennedy founded the service 16 years ago, endurance racing has won widespread approval in the C-suite. Kennedy recalls a chief executive many years ago asking that no photographs be taken of him on the race course. "He said, 'My stockholders will wonder why I'm not working,'" recalls Kennedy.

"Today's shareholders want their CEO to be healthy and fit," he says.