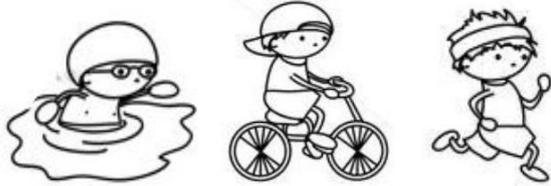


Somerset Try-a-Tri



*“The perfect
beginner’s triathlon!”*

TIPS Pt.3 – WHAT TO WEAR?

(The things beginners need to know about clothing/kit for a first Tri)

This is the third of our articles designed to help first-timers prepare for a triathlon. It deals with Tri Suits, alternative clothing you can use, and bits and pieces of equipment that will prove useful. Some of this has been covered partially in the other emails we've sent, so do get in touch if articles 1 & 2 didn't reach you. After this, our next Tips articles will be on the rules of Triathlon and Transitions.

What should I wear for a Triathlon?



I've had a lot of questions emailed in to me about clothing to wear on race day, and to be honest there are lots of options you could go for, but I've tried to break it down to a few simple guidelines on what to wear. A lot depends on your budget, what kit you've already got from other sports you already take part in and whether the Tri is a one-off or the start of a triathlon journey that's going to involve more races....



1. THE TRI SUIT

As you'd expect, the tri suit is the tailor-made costume that triathletes wear for all their events and they may also wear it for some of their training. It can be either one-piece or two-piece (in the above shots the guy on the left is in separate top & shorts while the others are one-piece suits – recent rule changes mean that separate top/shorts MUST overlap so that no midriff is on show for the bike & run sections).

The beauty of a tri suit is that it can be worn as a swimming costume (because it is tight-fitting, sleek and doesn't soak up loads of water), a cycling outfit (it has padding to protect you from saddle soreness & it will dry quickly while you are riding) and as running kit (it will breathe and "wick-away" sweat like proper running clothes do, and the seat padding is very narrow so shouldn't cause any leg chafing). It's quite normal to wear a tri suit for your first event. It won't make you look pretentious or "too serious" so if you are planning to do triathlons long term, you may as well get one before your first race. As with any kit, you need to wear it in training to make sure it is comfortable and fits well (you don't want to encounter a problem with it on race day!).

When buying a tri suit, it's good to go somewhere you can try it on and check the fit and also get some specialist advice. Bristol has a number of running shops, some of which offer triathlon kit, while probably the largest triathlon retailer in the UK is Tri UK down at Yeovil. Although we don't have one locally, the sports retail chain DECATHLON now have a partnership with British Triathlon and are retailing some very good value tri kit. I've even seen good quality tri kit in TK Maxx, but no-one in there would be able to tell you what size you need or what features the suit has, so you might need an experienced triathlete with you if buying from an outlet store like that.

The cheapest suits I have seen are under £40 but I've not tried them myself – maybe check out some online reviews before choosing a budget option. You can get something really good for around £80-£100, and a quality suit will serve you well and last a long time. I got one made by Sugoi which is awesome and has seen me

through events from Try-a-Tri through to Iron-distance in comfort. I think it cost around £30 for the shorts and £35 for the top back in 2008.

BTF Rules on Clothing

The rules of Triathlon are very specific when it comes to clothing. You can see the current rulebook for UK events online:

<https://www.britishtriathlon.org/competitionrules>

Here are a few key things to be aware of that might not be obvious to the first-timer:

*"The competitor must cover their torso during the entire race with the exception of the swim section; **this includes front zips being completely fastened during the cycle and run segments.**"*

"Competitors wearing a front zip suit must ensure it remains fully done up for the duration of competition."

*"Rain jackets are permitted, however **the competitor must ensure their race number is still visible at all times.**"*

2. WHAT IF I'M NOT THAT SERIOUS AND WON'T BE BUYING A TRI SUIT!?

OK then, there are other options. Any kit that you can swim, cycle and run in comfortably will do the job and ensure a speedy transition from one sport to the next (with no need to change your clothes).



Tight fitting lycra shorts and top will do, as in the pics of a cyclist and a running model shown above. For a Try-a-Tri, with its relatively short bike ride, you can get away without the seat padding of a tri suit. Whatever you choose, try it out first, especially in the pool. Anything that goes baggy in the water will really make your life more difficult when swimming, which is why I have stressed the importance of the kit being tight & stretchy e.g. Lycra.

3. SWIM IN SWIMMING GEAR, THEN PUT ON SHORTS & TEE SHIRT ON OVER IT...

If you don't have kit that will serve for all three sports, you can wear your regular swimming costume (swimsuit or, for the guys, trunks/shorts) for the swim. Then, after jogging out of the pool and into the transition area you can put on shorts and a tee shirt over the top. You have to be fully covered (top & shorts, which must overlap leaving no gap between) when leaving the transition area with your bike, and no nudity is allowed in the transition area as it is very public (and it's the rules). So, while you can put layers on, you can't take your swimming stuff off. This strategy will only work if you are confident you can cycle and run comfortably enough with the wet swimming kit still on underneath your other clothes.

If you would rather take all your swimming kit off before getting on the bike, and change into new, dry clothes, our Try-a-Tri does allow you the option to visit the changing rooms after the swim and then head out to the transition area after drying/changing. This will add lots of time to your race, and interrupt the flow from one sport to another which is one of the most fun things about triathlon (honestly, it is) but if you are more comfortable doing things that way, it is fine. You will need to have some clothes stashed ready, so arrive early in order to set up your kit in the transition area and stash your additional kit in the changing rooms. In most triathlon events, a full change in a changing room won't be possible but our Try-a-Tri does accommodate it.

Ladies will doubtless need a sport bra on the run, and as nudity is not allowed in transition between cycle and run, it's best to have the bra on from the start, worn under your swimming costume or other race kit (otherwise, as above, you need to visit the changing rooms between the swim and the cycle). If you want to see the variety of kit worn at our recent events take a look at our [Race Gallery](#).

WILL I GET COLD?

Before taking part in triathlon I imagined that getting on a bike in soaking wet clothes that I had just been swimming in would be a cold, unpleasant experience. In practice, I have only had to pull on extra layers on a couple of occasions, as normally it's warm enough as soon as you get pedalling. If you think you might need extra layers after exiting the swim, have these stashed in the transition area so you can put them on in T1 (the transition from swim to bike). Things you might want here include a windproof jacket or gilet (gilet = sleeveless jacket, much easier to put on when you're wet), hat/cycling gloves, baggy shorts (if you don't like the lycra look) or a tee shirt / top.

Once warmed up on the bike, you should start to dry out nicely in the sunshine. If the weather forecast looks dodgy, a jacket that is at least showerproof would be a good piece of kit to have with you. If it's raining but still mild, you might be fine without a jacket – see how you feel in training and try riding in the rain without one to see if you get really cold or not. Everyone has a different metabolism and responds differently to the conditions – I am often wrapped up with extra layers in races while others around me are wearing hardly anything, so there is no point copying what everyone else wears. Training for the event should include trying out your kit options and seeing what you are comfortable in when training in various different weathers and temperatures.

If you wear glasses/shades when running or cycling you might find a peaked cap under the bike helmet really useful. Shades are particularly useful in classic mixed English summer weather, where bright sunshine glares off the wet road after rain.

FOOTWEAR

As with clothing, there are several different options for triathlon when it comes to shoes and socks. In the article about transitions I will go into a little more detail about shoes & pedals. If you have specialist bike shoes, it is worth using them. If not, just wear running trainers for both the bike and run sections.

Having shoes that suit you well is important for running – specialist shops can help you get the right thing. Our sponsors Run and Become as well as Up and Running, Easy Runner or Moti in Bristol are good examples, or the triathlon shop mentioned in the clothing section. If you do go for specialist bike shoes, you can either put them on then push your bike out of transition to the mount line (although it can be awkward walking/jogging with bike shoes on, as you'll know if you own a pair!) or you can do what the experienced triathletes do and have them clipped in to your pedals already. This means pushing the bike up the road to the mount line in bare feet, so at the Try-a-Tri (which has quite a long gap from pool to mount-line) we make sure a marshal with a broom is on hand to keep that stretch of road swept. Again, all this is covered in more detail in the transition article.

SOCKS

Not that crucial for summer cycling for most of us, but they can be needed when running, to prevent blistering. Trouble is, they are hard to put on over wet feet – you can end up hopping around, getting frustrated, wrestling with a sock while everyone else merrily heads out of transition with their bike. So, have a go at cycling and running without socks and see if it works ok for you. If it does, you can simplify your transition experience by keeping socks out of the picture. If you find your feet get sore in certain spots when running/cycling sockless, try applying Vaseline or bodyglide

(water-based anti-chafe stuff; highly recommended) to the parts of the shoe that caused irritation. If this works, you can have the shoes primed with this greasy stuff in the relevant spots on race day, so that when you slip your feet in to them, the vulnerable parts of your feet will be protected. When putting your shoes on, talc or vaseline/bodyglide will make it much easier to get those wet feet down into the shoes. That's something else you should practise, to avoid the wrestling-with-a-shoe experience (see "wrestling with a sock", above).

If you just can't get the hang of sockless running or cycling, then have socks ready in T1 but try rolling them up into a "doughnut" shape so you can unroll them on to your wet feet instead of pulling them on in the normal way. Try it next time you get out of the shower – rolling the socks on is much quicker than pulling them up.



ELASTIC LACES

These are a cheap extra you can buy which will make transition quicker and easier. With these stretchy laces in your shoes, you can slip your shoes on and they will fit snugly enough around your feet for you to run comfortably – you'll have saved time and hassle by not having to tie your laces (which can take a surprisingly long time after the effort of swimming or cycling). Triathlon laces come in various types and when you fit them you need to make sure you have got the length and tightness right, both for easy slipping-on and comfortable running. This may need some trial-and-error and adjustment.

NUMBERS & NUMBER BELTS

You have to have a whole load of race numbers on you in a triathlon. There are number stickers that have to be attached to bike and helmet. Also, you have large race numbers that need to be worn on your back (for the cycle) and front (for the run). In addition to that, you have numbers written on you (transfer or permanent marker pen) before the start – on shoulder and leg – so you can be identified in the swim & first transition.



For the large paper numbers - well, actually made waterproof stuff called Tyvek - you can either pin them on to your top, one on the front one on the back, or attach them to a number belt (see pic above). The advantage of a number belt is that you can keep your number visible even if you change your kit. For example, if you have numbers pinned to a tee then you put on a jacket, you have to unpin the numbers and pin them to the jacket – **your race number has to be visible throughout the bike & run sections**. If the numbers are on a belt, you can slip the belt down, pop on the jacket and slip the belt back up over the top. Number belts cost a few quid (Triathlon shop, running shop, or google "triathlon number belt") and are just a thin piece of elastic with a buckle and some clips attached. Most triathletes have one. This is one piece of specialist kit that I would recommend everyone gets for the Try-a-Tri, as it is very cheap and can help you avoid complicated delays re-pinning your number.

SWIM GOGGLES



Not much need be said about goggles really except to make sure they fit securely and aren't going to slip off in the race or leak water into your eyes. In open water swimming, it's quite possible you'll take a knock in the face at the crowded start, but in a Try-a-Tri (or any pool-based triathlon) that shouldn't happen as swimmers all start separately at 10 second intervals and the lanes aren't crowded. I used to get problems with goggles misting up making it difficult to see, so now I use anti-fog spray (from a sports shop or specialist Triathlon shop) which works a treat. Apart from that, there's nothing technical you really need

to know about goggles. If you're short sighted you might want to try getting optical goggles. Mine cost £30 and have roughly the same prescription as my regular glasses have, so I can see clearly when I swim and also when I'm looking for my bike in transition.

EATING & DRINKING – BOTTLES ETC.

You are going to need a drink during the Try-a-Tri and some of you may even want to eat something small for energy on the run (you'll know from training if this applies to you). We will provide drinks on the run route and at the finish. If the weather is exceptionally hot, we will have small bottles of water available about half way round



the bike route in a layby. Any other drinks, or snacks if you feel you need them, will have to be provided by you. One option is to have a drink or snack (eg. low-tech such as jelly babies or high-tech such as energy gel) in the transition area and just take it before you get on your bike. Alternatively you can have a drink bottle attached to your bike frame and sip from this while riding. Make sure you practise this,

and don't drink on bumpy, bendy or fast downhill sections unless you're confident of your one-handed bike skills. You'll also need to make sure your "cage" that holds the bottle is not too loose, or your bottle may end up in the road. Usually you can just bend the cage so it's tight around the bottle and therefore secure.

If you want to carry your own drinks or snacks on the bike/run there are numerous products like the fuel belt and crossbar bag shown below that might prove useful.



Well, I think that's more than enough information on clothing and equipment! Hope I haven't overloaded you. The important thing is to sit down and have a think about what kit you want to use on the day which will be comfortable for each of the three sports and not too tricky to deal with in transition. Then have a practice using that kit to make sure it's OK.

Remember: don't try any new equipment on the day of the race that you haven't tested in advance.

There is a lot of info about the course on our race web site shown below and I'm happy to answer your questions any time.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR TRAINING!!

<http://uk.srichinmoyraces.org/triathlon>

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