

Triathlon Wetsuits - Guidance for Beginners

In the recent club survey a number of people asked for some guidance on purchasing a triathlon wetsuit. There are a number of guides and sources of advice on the internet and elsewhere. The following is intended to provide some guidance, but we cannot give a set of rules guaranteed to get you the right result as so much depends on budget, body shape/size and personal preference. It is also a personal view with all the caveats that apply. Having said that, here goes...

The first thing to say is that a triathlon wetsuit is not like other water sports wetsuits. It is specifically designed for swimming with flexibility around the shoulders and, if you purchase from a reputable manufacturer it will comply with the triathlon rules regarding thickness etc. Check out the rules and the compliant wetsuits at <http://www.competitive.com> . **Therefore do not buy from a surf or sailing shop unless they definitely stock triathlon wetsuits.**

Secondly, do you really want to buy? Open water triathlons are very different from pool-based ones. A mass start in murky water can come as a bit of a shock after a winter of following a black line up and down in clear water. Triathlon wetsuits are a significant investment, an entry-level suit is around £150+. **I suggest that hiring a suit for your first open-water event makes good sense.** I hired a suit for my first attempt. Hiring give you the opportunity to try the event and to try a make of wetsuit. Some events have their own hire fleets and some triathlon shops have hire suits and ex-demos for sale, for example <http://Triuk.com> . At the time I hired my suit I got the money back when I purchased a new wetsuit, so ask.

Assuming you still want to buy **I recommend trying on as many different makes as you can.** Assuming you are buying entry-level then all the manufacturers have a range of sizes based on height and weight. Do not assume that medium means the same to every suit manufacturer, it doesn't. One place where you can try on most of the different brands is at a Triathlon Show. Some specialist shops stock a number of brands, for example Sigma Sport <http://www.sigmasport.co.uk> stock Orca, Blue Seventy and 2XU. This may mean a bit of travelling so **why not get a group of novices with itchy credit cards together and make a road trip of it,** it's what the forum is for.

A wet suit is not designed to keep you dry; the clue is in the name. It keeps a thin layer of water next to your skin, you heat it up and away you go. The key words in the previous sentence are **keeps** and **thin**. A wetsuit should fit like a second skin, tight without constricting. A good fitting suit will not have any sags or wrinkles (small of the back and armpits are likely candidates) and definitely should not gape at the neck. A sagging neckline will act as a sea anchor and ensure you get a fresh change of cold water every couple of strokes. This will be hugely amusing for about 2 strokes, the rest of the 1500m will be a struggle.

For those of you who have led a sheltered life, women are shaped differently from men and many manufacturers have women specific suits and sizing. All of the above still applies.

A properly fitting wetsuit will feel snug in the dry, but breathing should not present a challenge. Once in the water it will loosen up.

Putting a suit on is a bit of an acquired skill and should not be attempted for the first time in front of a partner with a sense of humour or impressionable children. First tip, make sure your nails are short or they will slice through the neoprene. A carrier bag over your feet helps to get the lower limbs in place. Once your legs are in, take some time to gently work the suit into its correct position, working it a little at a time up the legs. When you are sure the crotch of the suit is where it should be then put the sleeves on using the same method as with the legs, possibly without the carrier bag. This will take some time and generate some heat but be patient. If the suit fitting went without a struggle, then the suit is too big, try a smaller one.

When the suit is on and adjusted into the best fit check all round for sags, wrinkles, air pockets and gapes. If you cannot get rid of these then try another size or another manufacturer. Don't be afraid to swing your arms round get the feel of the fit.

At a triathlon you can use lubricant to assist you into and more importantly out of the suit. Body Glide is the proprietary product, Body Shop cocoa butter has been used. Do not use petroleum based products like Vaseline or your suit will rot.

Some suit manufacturers for you:

2XU	http://www.2xu.com
Aquaman	http://www.aquamantri.com
BlueSeventy	http://www.blueseventy.com
Foor	http://www.triuk.com
Orca	http://www.orca.com
ProMotion	http://www.wetsuit.com
QR	http://www.rooworld.com
Snugg	http://www.snuggwetsuits.co.uk
T1	http://www.desotosport.com
Terrapin	http://www.terrapin-bfa.co.uk
XTERRA	http://www.xterrawetsuits.com
Zoot	http://www.zootsports.com

Unfortunately I have no local retailer recommendations so you will have to use the manufacturers' websites to locate the most convenient supplier to you

A number of the big websites provide mail order. If you know your size then this will be fine, if not then check out the returns policy and ensure you can send it back.

There is no substitute for trying on suits, but feel free to talk to anyone in the club about their experiences, good and bad.

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March 2011.