

Three ways to hone your swim skills



(Images: Jonny Gawler)

For triathletes, the off-season means doing your best to tackle your poorest skills, your aerobic stamina and tri-specific techniques, in that order.

With that in mind, **Joe Beer** brings you three ideas to give your water-based training a valuable boost this winter...

Central snorkel swimming



This simple device reduces head movement, allowing you to focus on arm pathways, body position and leg movement, elements that are all usually interrupted by having to breathe.

By using a central snorkel, you can also see more of what's happening at the front of the arm action and can develop a better rhythm – aided by the ease of oxygen delivery.

Session

Build short repetitions into blocks where efficient purchase on the water and economical movement forward will be the measure of success.

For example, do 10 x 50m with no less than 20-30secs recovery, allowing you to focus on what's not working and providing sufficient time to clear lactate build-up – this will allow you to remain calm and aerobic. Do a change of stroke (perhaps 50m breaststroke with snorkel) before repeating.

Benefits

Better efficiency of arm and legs means that less oxygen is robbed from propulsion by wasted muscle use or tension. If you relax and move through the water, you can build further aerobic fitness; neural pathways will be hard-wired into muscle memory.

Haul-outs



Triathlon – even pool-based events – requires its participants to quickly go from horizontal in the water to (preferably) vertical and running out of the water towards their bikes.

Haul-outs get you practising lifting your bodyweight at the end of any variety of swim-distance efforts or drills.

Session

This helps to break up swim sessions, while also testing your upper-body ability. It's also possible to do this exercise as part of a wetsuit session.

For example, 6 x [100m, haul out, walk to other end, 75m, haul out, walk to other end, 100m, haul out and re-group before the next 'off']. You swim a mile and walk 300m.

Benefits

This session offers strength work and is tri-specific. You're in a sport that mixes different disciplines, so do more of it in training to improve your transitions.

Wetsuit swimfest



Winter is a great time to wear your wetsuit. You can use the off-season period to get used to a more race-familiar body position, to gauge weight gain and to allow the speed/buoyancy effect to keep you feeling fast.

In groups you can do reduced-breathing mass starts (hypoxia) and practise sighting.

You race in a wetsuit, so train in a wetsuit.

Session

5 x 200m in wetsuit [on lengths 2, 4 and 6 include sighting the coach or a fixed object, such as a clock, every breath]. RI (rest interval) no less than 30secs.

10 x 25m group swim effort, all leaving at once – anything from four to 10 swimmers in a lane. It's anaerobic, like many a swim-start in real-life triathlons, and requires recovery from the effort/impact. For example, 45-60secs sculling time by the wall.

Benefits

Wetsuit swimming in a pool lets you know if your suit is still suitable for swimming or if you need a new one, that your stroke changes when you can't feel the water with your forearm covered, and that, like your race bike, a wetsuit can make you quicker if you practise with it.

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