

VE Velocity Events

Frequently Asked Triathlon Questions

Getting Interested?

What is Triathlon?

Short Answer:

Swim, Bike, Run

Long Answer:

Well not just that but mostly. It's a personal test of swimming, biking and running disciplines, against the clock. It's also against other athletes if you want but that is not a requirement. You can simply compete against the clock or yourself or just see if you can get round the course, it doesn't matter. Of course you can get madly competitive if you want to. The change from swim to bike and from bike to run is also part of the timed race, so these elements also need to be efficient. Triathlon races are normally categorised by gender and 5-year age group, so you will always be competing with similar people. This makes race competition very appealing.

How do I get involved?

Watch a race or try a race.

Turn up to one of the races listed on the site and just watch. You could help by manning a water station or the Jaffa cakes if you want, perhaps marshalling sometime. There are sometimes triathlon races on TV. You could enter a race and see how it goes. Marshals are always needed, without whom races cannot go ahead.

Am I too old for triathlon?

No.

We have a number of local racers in their 70's and my wife's uncle is still competing at age 91. Ok, he *is* the oldest triathlete on the planet (official - Guinness book of records next time). You should probably get a check-up and tell your doctor what you are planning unless you already maintain a reasonable level of fitness with regular, vigorous exercise.

How supportive are the the other competitors?

In my experience, very helpful.

Triathletes are generally very happy to share their experiences and knowledge. Perhaps not during a race but at most other times, advice on all aspects of the sport is readily available.

I'm afraid of being last

Don't be.

Every one of us started with very our first race. Most of us have come home in last place at least once. You will still get a cheer or applause when you cross the line because we know what it takes and you deserve it. If you come home last, you've worked longer than everyone else. Congratulations, you are a triathlete.

Getting Started

What do I wear?

Ideally a tri-suit but a swimsuit will do, then probably add shorts for the bike (top required for men after the swim). Goggles, optional swim cap.

For open-water events, a wet-suit is usual in this country and a bright swim cap for safety, making you easier to spot. Wear something under your

At a minimum, a swimsuit (typically one-piece) for the ladies. Swim shorts, trunks or jammers, and a singlet, cycle- or tee-shirt (technical or 'sports' fabric preferred) for the men. Baggy swim shorts will slow you down. The better choice for both is the tri-suit, either 1- or 2-piece as you prefer. This is a garment designed to be suitable for all phases of the triathlon race, being relatively quick-drying, offering support where required and enough padding (the 'chamois') for some comfort on the bike, without being cumbersome or uncomfortable during the run. They are designed to be used without underwear. Without this, you may need to add cycle shorts over your swim kit, or change in the venue's

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wet-suit, probably your bike/run kit, preferably a tri suit because whatever it is will get wet.

changing facilities. Baggy bike shorts will slow you down and possibly catch wildlife.

What sort of bike do I need?

A road legal bike with working brakes.

A road-legal bike which is in a good state of repair with demonstrably working brakes. Your bike will often be scrutineered as you enter transition to rack your bike before the race. Some race directors don't allow Mountain Bikes (MTBs). This is presumably because a knobbly tyre is not best suited to use on the road - fewer contact points can mean less grip in the corners and certainly in the wet. A "hybrid" or a "road" tyre is certainly a better choice, as is a proper "road" bike but we do understand that this can be a significant outlay for testing the waters of your first triathlon or two. Velocity Events do permit MTB's. Just bear this in mind while racing - be safe. The government's cycle to work scheme can be a source of a decent first road bike. The benefit of a road bike is aerodynamics. Getting lower, ducking the air stream is more efficient and you will go faster as a result. They also have more suitable gearing and probably less weight.

Do I need cleats/clips or fancy bike shoes?

No, unless your bike has cleat-type pedals.

Firstly, let's look at the terminology:

- There are regular pedals: like on every bike you ever had as a kid. They work with your trainers/run shoes. Simple!
- There are clips: these are toe-clips which very obviously hook over the front of whatever footwear you use and probably have a strap to keep them - or your foot - in place. They can be difficult to escape from when you have to stop and put a foot down.
- There are cleats: These are adjustable fittings, firmly attached to the sole of proper bike shoes to connect you efficiently to the pedals for transferring maximum energy to the bike. You can "clip in" and then "clip out" of them with a sideways twist of the foot for stopping at traffic lights or whatever.

Note that the use of the word "clip" here can be confusing as the cleat system is "clipless". This certainly baffled me for a while but means that toe-clips as above are not used. There are MTB and road style cleats and that's where I run out of talent and knowledge. In a longer race, such as Olympic distance or more, cleats are an advantage. In a short race, such as a super-sprint, they probably don't save the time taken up by changing. For a sprint race, 20k bike course, the jury is out. People go either way. I prefer to change once into my running shoes and save the time spent fiddling with cleats and velcro but then I've never used cleats yet. Strong bikers may well take the reverse view that it's worth a few seconds to gain the pull on the pedals allowed by proper cycling footwear. You choose - I might be a wimp.

What other equipment do I need?

Crash helmet, run shoes, towel, water, transition bag or box, perhaps a gel or other race 'fuel' or nutrition. Race number belt or safety pins.

For transition, I use a plastic supermarket-style basket with a small drainage hole drilled in each corner. Consider anti-fog spray for goggles, maybe sunglasses to keep flies, wasps, grit, dust out of your eyes on the bike and run. Prescription swim goggles are available. Your favourite run hat or visor. I carry a hole punch to make threading my race number onto the number belt easier (tart!). You may want Body Glide or similar lubricant to reduce chafing perhaps under the arms or at the wet-suit neck or, erm, other places. I use two water bottles on the bike, with whatever amount of water I need shared between them. This is because

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I have dropped a bottle more than once, mostly when wet, and had to complete the bike course without. Using two means I always have something. Don't use petroleum-based lubricant such as Vaseline with a wet-suit, neoprene doesn't like it. You can use lubricant on the forearms and/or lower legs to speed wet-suit removal but keep it off the hands as it will slow down that same process, make them slippery on the bike and some say it adversely affects the 'catch' in the water.

How do I train?

Apart from the obvious swim, bike and run training, any endurance or strength training will contribute positively.

Beyond the obvious three disciplines, good core strength is useful, endurance is obviously a benefit, in fact any training causing you to break a sweat, breathe hard or significantly raise your heart rate for a period of 30 minutes or more, several times a week will improve your fitness. With this in mind, you can really mix up your training if life, weather or whatever gets in the way sometimes. Obviously, the three big ones are very important, as are "brick" sessions, involving two of these in one session. Swim-bike is good if you can but it can be impractical. Most of us can manage bike-run sessions though, and this is particularly useful as anyone will tell you running after a hard bike ride is the most difficult part. Join a tri-club if you can: [Deal Tri](#), [Sevenoaks tri](#), [Ashford tri](#), [Dartford+WhiteOak tri](#). For open water swimming, other than in the sea, there is [Lake 1 swimming club, Lydd, Kent](#). No doubt other examples can also be found.

What are the race distances?

Pool-based races typically have a shorter swim.

Olympic/standard distance or greater is not generally offered from a pool start.

Race distances frequently vary, depending on available routes. Even the actual Olympic 2012 triathlon had a 42.7k bike leg.

Race	Pool / Open	Bike	Run	Miles
Super-sprint	200m 400m	10k	2.5k	0.25 6.2 1.5
Sprint	400m 750m	20k	5k	0.5 12 3
Olympic	1.5k	40k	10k	1 24 6.2
Half-iron	1.93k	90k	21.1k	1.2 56 13.1
ITU Long	4k	120k	30k	2.5 74.5 18.5
Full-iron	3.86k	180k	44.2k	2.4 112 26.2

How do I enter?

On-line via a Race Entry link at www.velocity-events.co.uk

Use the "Race Entry" links on the site's race pages and either enter on-line or print the form and do it by post if you prefer. When filling in the form, in either case, please enter your gender and correct date of birth as this affects the age-group in which you will be placed in the results. Please also enter a realistic swim-time (for the distance stated) as this will affect your start time, placing you among similar swimmers in order to reduce overtaking in the pool or among dissimilar swimmers in order to reduce crowding in open water. In open water races, we make every effort to put members of the same club/family in the same wave. We thank you for entering your details correctly as this smooths the preparation of start data for race day.

Race Day

[Registration](#), [Transition setup](#), change, [Swim](#), [Transition1](#), [Bike](#), [Transition2](#), [Run](#), finish, [Results](#), eat jaffa cake, attend medal ceremony, change, pack up, go home feeling quite pleased with yourself, [book another race on-line](#).

Registration

When you arrive, go to the registration tent/office/room/table. Collect

When you arrive at Race HQ, go to registration to confirm your presence for the race. Collect your race number 'bib' (1 or 2), sticky labels (usually 2 or 3) and for open water races, your electronic timing chip.

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your bib number(s), bike & helmet labels and maybe your timing chip.

For pool-based races, this is normally issued at pool-side. You may also be body-marked with a marker pen on upper-arm and/or calf and/or hand. Take your bike, helmet and other transition items into transition for racking and set-up. Your bike and helmet may be scrutineered on the way in. Stick one label the bike crossbar. If there are 2 labels, the other is for the front of the helmet, if 3 then one on each side. You will be checked on exit after the race to ensure your bike label and body mark match.

What time will it start?

Often 7am but check the Race Info page on the web site.

Races frequently start at 7am. This is to get them done while there is least traffic on the roads, before it gets too warm and to avoid occupying the whole day. Pool-based swims are started slowest swimmer first see the 'Swim' section below for more about this. Go to the web site www.velocity-events.co.uk select the race in question and this will show you the Race Info page, where you should find what you need. A day or two before the race, we usually publish approximate start times for each swimmer.

How do I set up transition?

Rack your bike, usually at your race-numbered rack position, check water bottle(s). Place shoes, helmet, bike/run top with number(s) or race number belt conveniently for fast changeovers.

Hang your bike on the racking, usually by hooking the front of the seat over the bar, with the bike facing the intended direction of exit. Check that your wheels spin freely as binding brakes will certainly slow you down. Check that the bike is in a good gear to get away efficiently. Leave the pedals in the right position to get away quickly. If they stay there, it helps. If you have a cycle computer, set the trip meter to zero, especially if the race consists of laps. You won't then have to worry about counting the laps or more importantly, losing count - you will know how far you have to go. You will want to leave your helmet on the bike or in the box/ on your bag. My bike has Tri-bars or TT bars, which is a good place for the helmet. I also hold it down by stretching the number belt around helmet and brake hoods. This gives the minor bonus that I can see my race number as I run towards it. Sunglasses can often be inserted into crash helmet holes, meaning you can get going before spending time fiddling with them. If you use cycle shoes and cleats, you can 'tie' the shoes via the rear loops to parts of the bike with rubber bands so that they are in a good position to leap on the bike and start pedalling immediately, and also so they don't scrape the ground while running alongside the bike. The bands will break as soon as you start pedalling. This strategy means running barefoot before and after the bike leg. Check what's underfoot before committing to this. If it might rain, you may want to put your run shoes in a plastic bag, not because rain is unpleasant necessarily but because wet shoes weigh more. Otherwise, perhaps on a small towel to dry or clean the feet slightly before the shoes go on. A familiar towel may help you find your bike a little quicker. Nutrition - a gel for example - can be taped to your crossbar with masking tape. Alternatively, a "Bento box" or small nylon bag, fixed with Velcro at the front of the crossbar, will contain several of these, plus car key etc. When all things are placed "just so", fiddle with them obsessively for a while to make the rest of us feel normal. When you've done all that, it's worth walking transition to familiarise yourself with all the routes needed in the race and how your bike position looks from the 'swim in' and 'bike in' perspective. Remember there will be no bike on the rack. Maybe count rack rows. Flags, balloons and other obvious markers are not permitted.

The Race Process

The Swim

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Be at the pool on time, line up in numerical body-mark order, watch what preceding swimmers do. Do the same but faster if you can.

In a **pool-based** race, swimmers start one at a time, in lane 1 of the pool. The timing team will issue your race chip, which is best worn on your left ankle as it is least likely to get muddled up in your bike chain later on. The start marshal will check your race number body mark and chip number before you get into the water. When doing so, please don't impede the previous swimmer. After a typical 3-2-1 countdown, swim up the outside edge of the lane, turn, and swim back down the other side of the lane. Note: You will keep the lane ropes or pool edge on the same shoulder throughout the swim, so if you started on the left side of the pool, you will keep your left shoulder next to the side or rope throughout. After every two lengths, duck under the rope and do it again. Lanes can be quite narrow, so look out for the previous swimmer as you may need to pass each other. If the following swimmer touches your feet, you should stop at the end of the lane to let him/her pass, before you continue. At the pool exit, climb out, walk - do not run, it's slippery - to the exit door. If conditions allow, you may then jog/run to your bike, paying attention to marshal instructions at all times.

In an **open-water** race, waves of perhaps 50 or more swimmers start together, in the water. Only in elite races do they dive in, in my experience. Swim around the buoys as directed in the race briefing, sighting frequently to make sure you are taking the shortest route to the next buoy. You must pass the buoy on the correct side, so be sure you understand the route and don't trust another swimmer to know more than you - they may not. Hint: Try to gauge your swim speed relative to the others around you. If you are likely to be slower than most, hang around toward the back of the start area. If you are a good swimmer, go nearer the front, to avoid swimming over slower swimmers and perhaps toward one side if you're not comfortable in the thick of it.

T1 - Transition 1 - from swim to bike

Drop your goggles and cap in your box, put on race number bib, helmet and shoes. Grab the bike and run with it to the "bike out" gate. Mount the bike *after* you've stepped over the "mount" line.

This is when you dump your hat and goggles in your box, bag or whatever, put on your bike or bike/run shoes (unless your shoes are pre-clipped to the bike), maybe socks, race number 'bib' and most importantly your crash helmet. You must not move your bike before your helmet is properly secured on your head. Disqualification will likely result from this mistake. If you need to change clothes, note that nudity is not permitted in transition. Men may swim in shorts, budgie smugglers or the like but at this point must add some kind of shirt or top. Your race number may be safety-pinned to your shirt or it may be on a race-number belt. This is ideal because the number is supposed to be on the back during the bike leg and on the front during the run. If two numbers are supplied, you should pin one on both sides. If you use a belt, you can use one number and move it round as required. Grab your bike and run with it to "bike out" but don't get on it until you have stepped over the "mount" line.

The Bike

Once over the "mount" line, get on and pedal hard, following the road unless arrows or marshals tell you to turn.

Drafting on the bike is not permitted. Keep a gap of 3 bike lengths between you and the bike in front of you unless overtaking, when you have 15 seconds to get your wheel in front of theirs.

Once you have passed the "mount" line (having placed at least one foot over that line) you may mount your bike. Pedal furiously all the way, following the line of the road unless directed to turn by race route signage and/or a marshal. If you turn off the 'main road' for any other reason, you are off course, possibly lost and may miss out on post-race jaffa cakes. You are required to obey the rules of the road during any road race. Failure to do so is dangerous, illegal and may lead to disqualification. At the end of the bike course, you will approach transition once again. You must dismount your bike before crossing the "dismount" line, placing at least one foot on the ground before that line. The actual line may be imaginary but there will be a sign and a marshal. **Drafting** is not permitted during the bike segment. This is where you or

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others could gain an advantage by following closely in the slipstream of one or more other riders or sheltering from crosswinds etc. ITU and Olympic races allow this, others typically do not. If you imagine a 3 metre wide by 7 metre long box, extending backwards from the front edge of your front wheel and those of all other riders, these boxes may overlap for no more than 30 seconds while overtaking. Responsibility rests with the following rider and if he/she cannot enter that zone and get their front wheel in front within 15 seconds, they must drop back outside the zone within a further 15 seconds. Similarly, if the overtake is successful, the overtaken rider has 15 seconds to drop back if necessary, out of the imaginary box.

Hints. In the last few hundred metres, take a drink before the run, spin the legs in a lower gear to help with the run, and maybe stand and stretch legs and hips a little. These are all better done on the bike while moving forward, rather than while stationary in transition.

T2 - Transition 2 - from bike to run

Run with the bike to your rack position, rack the bike, then undo and remove your helmet, run shoes on, go, turning race number to the front as you go.

Having crossed the dismount line, you then run with your bike, possibly around a prescribed route inside transition, to your rack position, where you must rack your bike before removing or even un-doing your helmet. You may make any other changes to your clothes, footwear, sunglasses, hair etc, grab a drink if needed, being mindful about what drink stations are on the run course, if any, then head for "run out" to begin the final segment of the race. You could have a disposable bottle in transition, ready to grab as you leave, which you can then drop off as you pass a race marshal. Littering is not permitted during any part of a race but it is quite acceptable to drop such things when passing a marshal station. Some race belts offer water bottle facilities which may be good if you need more.

The Run

Run. Run to the finish, get some water and a jaffa cake. Well done.

Run like the wind, run like you've never done before, perhaps like you've never *run* before after all that biking. Follow the road, race signage and marshal instructions all the way to the finish. As you approach, put your sunglasses on top of your head, clip on a big smile, raise your arms aloft and hope someone is taking a photo. Well done, you've finished your first, second, ... triathlon. Get a jaffa cake, maybe a bacon buttie and sign up for the next one. If this is your third race or more, you've probably already signed up for the next one because you're hooked like the rest of us. Well done and welcome.

Results

Your personal results may be available when you cross the line and will be posted on the web site's race page under Results.

The timing team can often give you a printout of your performance immediately after you finish. Results are posted on the web site usually next day and let you compare your results with everybody else's.

This is just my personal take on answers to typical questions. I am just another triathlete. Seek advice from the people around you, who will probably have many different answers, based on their own experiences. Most importantly, enjoy yourself.

About me

I came to triathlon after a running injury, probably caused by over-enthusiasm and over-use, caused me to limp the last 2 or 3 miles of each of three half-marathons. I had run as far as 20 miles in one go and of course felt invincible until those three races taught me otherwise. It was then I began to look for alternative challenges with shorter run distances and found Velocity Events' Leatherhead Triathlon in January 2011. This was to be an indoor super-sprint event, with a 3k treadmill run, 10k gym bike and

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200m pool swim which sounded ideal. I did ok, considering my breast-stroke, learned 40 years previously and not practiced much since, certainly never raced, was distinctly average. Encouraged by this, I entered the East Leake, near Loughboro, triathlon in March, a sprint distance event. Ok, it was a very long drive but I was keen to find pool-start events in which I could practise my new-found lunacy. The race went well enough on a cold morning, getting on the bike wringing wet in a chilly 6 degrees but was still enjoyable. Most importantly, the injury didn't trouble me at the 5k run distance. Another 'away' race at RAF Wattisham in May was also successful. Cycling around the roads on the base, up and down the runway was quite a blast and, once again, the leg stood up to the 5k run. I was having real fun with this. Nearer home, I had found Velocity Mike's other sprint events and entered Cranbrook, Canterbury, Medway and Tunbridge Wells sprint races and a couple of informal events at Action Watersports, also organised by Mike. I was cookin' on gas. After all this success, I decided to try the big one, The Windfarmer standard (Olympic) distance in September, Mike's last tri of the year - twice the distance I was used to. Well it worked, I got round and finished. Ok, the time was unremarkable at 3 hours 10 minutes but for a relative newbie in the 55-59 age group, not a bad year's work. From super-sprint indoors to proper Olympic distance, if I can do it, so can you.

What training did I do?

I gave up smoking again in 2000 and needed something to keep the pounds off me and to keep me off the dreaded weed. I went to a circuit-training class run by the local gym in a sports hall. Well I felt like dying and stopped three or four times during the warm-up but just about summoned the will-power to stay for the rest of the hour. Strangely, I went back the following week and perhaps found it slightly more achievable, so I continued. After some months, I added a second circuit class each week and over time, perhaps each year, added a Body Pump class, a Step class, some visits to the pool, a Spin class. In about 2008, for no apparent reason other than the suggestion from a good friend from work, I tried running. Just 3k run-walk round the block during lunch but somehow that stuck. I had always said I could never - and would never run but here I was doing just that. After a couple of weeks up to 5k, still doing the classes in the evenings. I booked a Man on the Run 5k, for charity with that good friend from work which went well. A couple of his friends from Thanet Roadrunners turned out just to cheer him - us - on. Fabulous. Still the run distances improved, 5 miles, 10k, this is great. Another Roadrunner invited us to run some cross-country miles with her and some friends which we did and was just great. I have since joined Thanet Roadrunners. Now doubling up on a few classes, the week is getting quite busy, as is the washing machine. I should probably do less classes and get out on the bike more. Actually, that injury has come back to haunt me and I have eased back on the classes and the running, favouring some extra swim training while my Physio sorts out the knee injury and while doing what I can in this season's races. This seems to be working, so I can get back to some proper balanced training after my last race of the year, the London Triathlon Olympic distance.