

Give tri a try

In this issue, Chinnor-based personal fitness trainer, **Hilary Westall**, talks triathlons



Training in the winter can be tough as the days get colder and the nights draw in. Taking up a new exercise challenge is a great way to keep you motivated, giving you something to work towards when the prospect of a comfy sofa threatens to destroy all your good intentions. So, if you don't like running enough to do the marathon and you can't take time out to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, a triathlon could be just the ticket, giving you plenty of time to train for when the season starts in the spring - even if you are a newcomer to exercise.

Currently the fastest growing sport in the UK, a triathlon consists of swimming, running and cycling, back to back, over a large variety of distances, with either an open water or pool-based swim. And if you thought triathlons were only for the super-fit then you only have to go along to an event to see that competitors come in all shapes, sizes, ages and levels of fitness and that triathlon is a truly welcoming and friendly sport. Whether you want to compete to race or just get round, the multi-sport training involved will give you variety, all-over muscle toning and a fantastic cardiovascular workout, without the repetitive strain incurred when focusing on one activity.

Most people can ride a bike, are able to swim and can get fit enough to run a reasonable distance without stopping. However, it's unlikely that you will be equally strong across all three disciplines, so you need to train accordingly, working on weaker areas, and pick races that suit your ability. As well as the classic race distances shown in the box-out, there are many variations of distance on offer. For example, organiser Human Race (www.humanrace.co.uk) offers a super sprint distance of a 200m swim, 5k bike and 2.5k run, which is perfect for

beginners; a sprint distance with a shorter swim (400m); and a Challenge distance, which is slightly shorter than the standard Olympic distance. Many races also offer team or relay entries, where you may only need to do one of the three disciplines.

As a rough guide, novices should aim for a sprint or less, whilst the fitter and more advanced triathletes can aim for Olympic and above. Half Ironman and Ironman are not for the novice or faint hearted!

If swimming is your weakest discipline, then it's worth getting some proper coaching to improve your efficiency in the water as it's more likely to be your technique than your fitness that holds you back. If you are a novice, or unsure how to structure your training, a coach or personal trainer can give you a triathlon-specific training schedule to follow that is safe, progressive and includes weight training and core stability. There are also local clubs you can join, which offer dedicated sessions, a wealth of knowledge and know-how and even a social life!

There's nothing like training in the great outdoors to beat off the winter blues and get those miles under your belt, both out on your bike or on your feet, but if the weather makes it impossible then you can still train indoors. Group cycling sessions (Spinning, studio cycling) can give you a fantastic workout, the pool is obviously indoors, and you can put in some invaluable speed work on a treadmill.

Even at a basic level, there is a fair amount of kit needed to embark on a triathlon, including decent running shoes, a swimsuit and goggles (and a wetsuit if you intend to swim in open water), a bike in good working order,

bike helmet and associated clothing, such as cycling shorts, gloves, eyewear, and so on.

You can spend a small fortune on the trendiest, most eye catching, gear, but you don't have to - try and beg, borrow or hire what you can, certainly for your first race or two, and before you remortgage for the best kit in town only to find triathlon isn't quite your cup of tea.

You don't have to look very far to find a race near you as Thame has hosted a triathlon for the last two years. Based at the Thame Leisure Centre and organised by Just Racing UK, the 400 metre pool-based swim, flat 11 mile bike course, and 3 mile run on the Phoenix trail, make it the perfect distance and terrain for a first event. 2010's race is scheduled for July 25 and, as with most races, you can enter online. Another hugely popular event that takes place nearby is the Blenheim triathlon in early June. With a stunning setting in the grounds of Blenheim Palace and an open water swim in the lake, you can choose from a sprint or super sprint distance. For other events and information, check out the links below - and go and give it a try!

Useful links:

Human Race - www.humanrace.co.uk
 Just Racing UK - www.justracinguk.com
 Blenheim triathlon - www.theblenheimtriathlon.com
 British Triathlon Federation - www.britishtriathlon.org/events
 Oxford triathlon club - www.oxfordtri.co.uk
 The Fix UK - www.thefixuk.com

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COMPETITION

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	Swim	Bike	Run
Sprint (beginners)	750 metres	20k (12m)	5k (3.1m)
Olympic (intermediate & advanced)	1500 metres	40k (24m)	10k (6.2m)
Half Ironman (advanced)	1900 metres	90k (56.25m)	21.1k (13.2m)
Ironman (advanced++)	2.4 miles	112 miles	26.2 miles