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12 ESSENTIALS FOR YOUR FIRST TRIATHLON

The thrifty first-timer's triathlon shopping list

By Rebecca Roosen

Training for three sports can be overwhelming at times. And buying all the gear for three sports can be a whole other beast. But it doesn't have to be. If high-tech gear is your thing, then you've settled into the right sport. If you'd rather do without the gadgets—or at least the cost of them—you can certainly get by and have fun—and actually do well—with just a handful of key pieces of equipment. So if you'd rather keep your money in the bank, concentrate on the essentials below . . . at least for now.

WETSUIT. Depending on where you live and what time of year you intend to race, you'll likely need a wetsuit. You have a few options: a full-sleeve suit, a sleeveless suit or a two-piece suit, which comes with a bib-john and either a vest or a full-sleeve top. Again, if you know you'll be racing in April in the Pacific

Ocean, go with the full-sleeve suit (plus, once you get used to full sleeves these suits will typically be faster for most athletes than sleeveless suits). Regardless of what you decide, it's important to buy—or borrow—a triathlon-specific suit rather than one for surfing or diving. Triathlon wetsuits are manufactured with more flexible neoprene that accommodates the movements of swimming. If your races all feature pool swims, then you can forgo the wetsuit in favor of a swimsuit or trisuit (see below).

WETSUIT LUBE. This may seem like a small detail, but you'll understand its importance when you forget it and come out of the swim with a raw neck. Wetsuit lubes are made to protect your skin from the way the wetsuit rubs as you move your arms and turn your head from side to side. Apply in all areas where chafing is a concern, such as the neckline and under the arms.

GOGGLES. Finding the right goggles is a bit of a trial-and-error process. The key is to find goggles that are comfortable and don't leak. Test a few different pairs during your training swims to see which ones fit your face the best. Clear and comfortable vision during racing is crucial. (The event will provide a swim cap.)

TRISUIT. You may have been training in old gym shorts and T-shirts, but you'll need something more tri-friendly on race day. Again, you have a few options for underneath the wetsuit: a one-piece trisuit or tri shorts and a tri top. The trisuit will take you from start to finish. In a non-wetsuit-legal swim, its slick design allows for minimal drag in the water. Trisuits have a padded chamois for the bike. However, some say there isn't enough padding for the ride, and larger-busted women often report there isn't enough support on top for the run. If trisuits aren't working for you, you'll need tri shorts and a tri top.

TRIATHLON SHORTS AND TOP. Most tri shorts are made of a nylon and spandex. The material makes for a smooth layering under the wetsuit and dries quickly once on the bike and run. Like tri shorts, tri tops are designed with quick-drying materials. Make sure your tri top has adequate pockets on the sides and/or back so you can stash your energy gels/bars for the ride and run in longer-distance events.

BIKE. The bike is where you can either spend a lot of money or save a lot, depending on what you're going for. Newbies, know this much: It makes perfect sense to either borrow a bike or use the one you already have for at least your first race. No tri bike needed. A 10-year-old mountain bike will do. A neighbor's road bike works, too. Many of the fastest professionals started out the same way—just be sure the bike you ride is mechanically safe by dropping it by your local bike shop for a tune-up. What matters is that you put in your training miles. If you don't have aerobars for your road bike, skip them. That said, if you're itching for a new toy, first settle on a budget (because there's a wide range) and then check out our annual bike-buyer's guide in the April issue for more direction.

HELMET. This is a non-negotiable item. The helmet should sit level on your head and should line up with the middle of your forehead. You should not be able to wiggle the helmet forward or backward on your head. If you can, it's too loose.

TOOL KIT. A basic tool kit includes a spare tube; tire levers to remove your tire; a patch kit and a good pump. This is everything you'll need for basic repairs while training and on race day. You can find ready-made tool kits at bike shops. Attach it under your bike seat so you're never without it.

SUNGLASSES. You'll want to wear shades on the bike and the run. Sunglasses shield your eyes from the wind, dirt and insects coming at you. Look for sunglasses that have UVA and UVB protection, and make sure they're shatterproof. Even if it's not a sunny day, the rays can still irritate and eventually damage your eyes, so it's best to wear them throughout the run, too, unless you're sporting a running cap.

RUNNING SHOES. Many running injuries stem from having the wrong type of shoe for your biomechanics. The bottom line: go to a running specialty store and have them observe your running style and ask for their recommendations. You can wear your running shoes on the bike as well, if you opt to forgo cycling-specific shoes and pedals, which is a perfectly reasonable choice for your first tri.

SOCKS. Unless you consistently run without socks and don't get blisters, don't try it at your first race. The last thing you want is to have to limp across the finish line because of burning, bloody heels.

HYDRATION AND NUTRITION. If your first race is a sprint-distance triathlon, which is likely to be the case, there's really no need to over-think nutrition. A balanced breakfast a few hours prior and a pre-race energy bar should do the trick. Then take two water bottles on the bike, one with sports drink and one with water. Aid stations on the run should be sufficient for hydrating on the last leg. ▲

For some, shopping for gear is fun. For others, it's a complete pain in the butt. If the latter applies to you, check out the Triathlon LAB starter kit. "We were trying to make it more affordable for people who were participating in our triathlon training camps to purchase everything they would need," says Lloyd Taylor, CEO/founder of Triathlon LAB. For \$950, the package includes all of the gear listed below. Hassle-free.

TRIATHLON LAB STARTER KIT

1. Felt Z100 bicycle (complete bike)
2. Profile century aerobar
3. Water bottle
4. Water-bottle cage
5. Rocket Science Sports long-john wetsuit
6. Triathlon shorts, either men's or women's tri shorts from De Soto, Zoot Sports, Sugoi, Pearl Izumi or Profile Design
7. Triathlon top, same options as above
8. Uvex Hawk helmet
9. TYR Racetech goggles
10. Latex TYR swim cap
11. Rocket Science transition duffel bag

12. Race belt

13. Body Glide

For more information, go to triathlonlab.com.

