

**T**o some, the idea of enduring a triathlon is madness. Pushing the body to its absolute limits can be perceived as utter foolishness or an act of sheer brilliance. Imagine the scene as the athletes prepare to swim out to sea, shivering as they enthusiastically enter the water. An hour or so later stumbling out of the water, not being able to see straight and asking for their bikes which are often positioned right in front of them. Ready to collapse they start to try to run with legs of jelly. But it's an intoxicating sport and not every triathlon is the ironman distance of 3.8K swim, 180K bike and 42K run which takes even the best several hours to complete! Most triathlons are much more manageable distances

with plenty of sprint challenges which most reasonably fit runners would be up to – see how our 'trainee triathlete' got on at the *Running fitness* Triathlon in Nottingham if you need further proof.

The most interesting benefit of triathlon training for serious runners is the effect that swimming and cycling can have on your performance. Swimming, cycling and running are all endurance sports and to incorporate each of these into a training schedule would seem to achieve exciting results. Many people who enter triathlons primarily as runners discover that their running times, despite years of remaining constant, suddenly fall.

Not only does the training offer variety, due to the components of the triathlon, it enables you to train for longer because of shifting the emphasis from one sport to another. Long, slow distance running (LSD) increases the pulse rate to about 130 beats per minute. When this is achieved on a bike or swimming lengths of a pool, you can

Story by Catherine Milner > Photography by Allsport

Did you know that the advantages of triathlon training can be beneficial while recovering from injury, and can also knock your times down like no pure running session ever will? Catherine Milner investigates the benefits of multi-sport competition for runners

# Try a tri





## TRIATHLON

- retain cardiovascular fitness without putting your body through the level of shock absorption experience by running.

Therefore, triathlon training reduces the risk of injury and also enhances aerobic fitness. For example, a 50-minute swim does not produce the same effect as a 50-minute session on the running track. Although swimming uses all muscles in the body, it is the least demanding physiologically of triathlon's sports. While injury may prevent you from running, carrying out forms of cross training divides training demands between muscle groups, enabling you to transfer the benefits of your secondary sport to the primary one.

Frank Shorter, former Olympic marathon champion, used duathlon training (run and bike) when injury prevented him distance running. He calculated that to gain the effect of a six to seven-mile run, he had to cycle for 45 minutes to an hour at a steady pulse rate of 140 beats per minute.

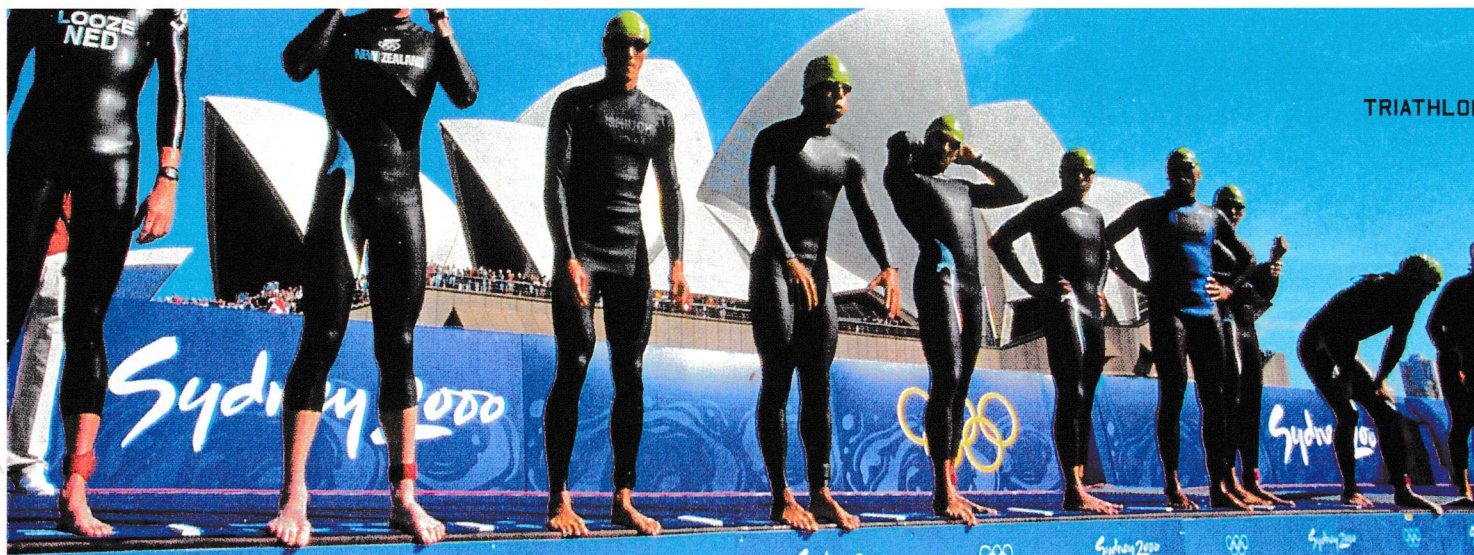
The first leg of all triathlons begins with the swim. Swimming can be the most unnerving aspect, especially in open water. It is the shortest part of the race, but the crowds at the start will fire that adrenaline rush. If you are a novice to triathlon, you should allow six weeks for the bulk of your intense training. Allow longer for those of you not in good swimming shape – another two or three months. It is important to practice in the open water a couple of times before the event, even if just to acclimatise yourself to the challenge of the water temperature!

Getting the right equipment is essential and need not be expensive. This includes a good pair of goggles, a swimming cap and you may require a wet suit. Try to incorporate two swimming sessions a week into your schedule. Devote one to speed and the other to endurance, as this will prepare you for the start when everyone goes off fast. Swim with pull-buoys. This will hold your legs

## 'Triathlon training reduces the risk of injury and also enhances aerobic fitness'

up in the pool and improve your upper body strength. Swim a minimum of the race distance each day, varying your stroke if you are comfortable with this, as it will increase your strength and you will feel the benefits of a lusty workout. Try to build up to one-and-a-half times the race distance. Not only will this improve your confidence when you enter the water, you will also be much stronger at swimming a lesser distance. For more detailed training schedules, refer back to the excellent pool swimming drills and open-water swimming advice by triathlete and swim coach Nigel French in issues seven, eight and nine.

Once you have managed to drag yourself out of the water, the next test is to get on your bike. To train for this, as always, a good warm-up is necessary, at a slow speed. Slow means pedalling at a speed that a good runner could easily overtake you. Aim for anything between 15 to 50 miles. You may need to try to reach the 15-mile mark first if you have never tried cycling before. Fifteen miles allows you to gradually build on your speed, get in some decent endurance pedalling and incorporate a warm-down. A minimum of one hour's cycling or 15 miles should prove a good, energetic workout.



For beginners to the triathlon, who are primarily runners, it is the cycling aspect that usually presents the greatest difficulty at first. Runners are used to the satisfactory feeling of having flogged their legs and pounded the ground after a gruelling road run. Runners generally take some time to adjust, as although the heart lungs and muscles have had an equally beneficial workout, the joints will not feel pushed to the limit. It may be tempting to try out the big gears; this is a big mistake. The little gears will help keep your knees intact. Professional cyclists use the little gears at the start of each season for a couple of months because it works.

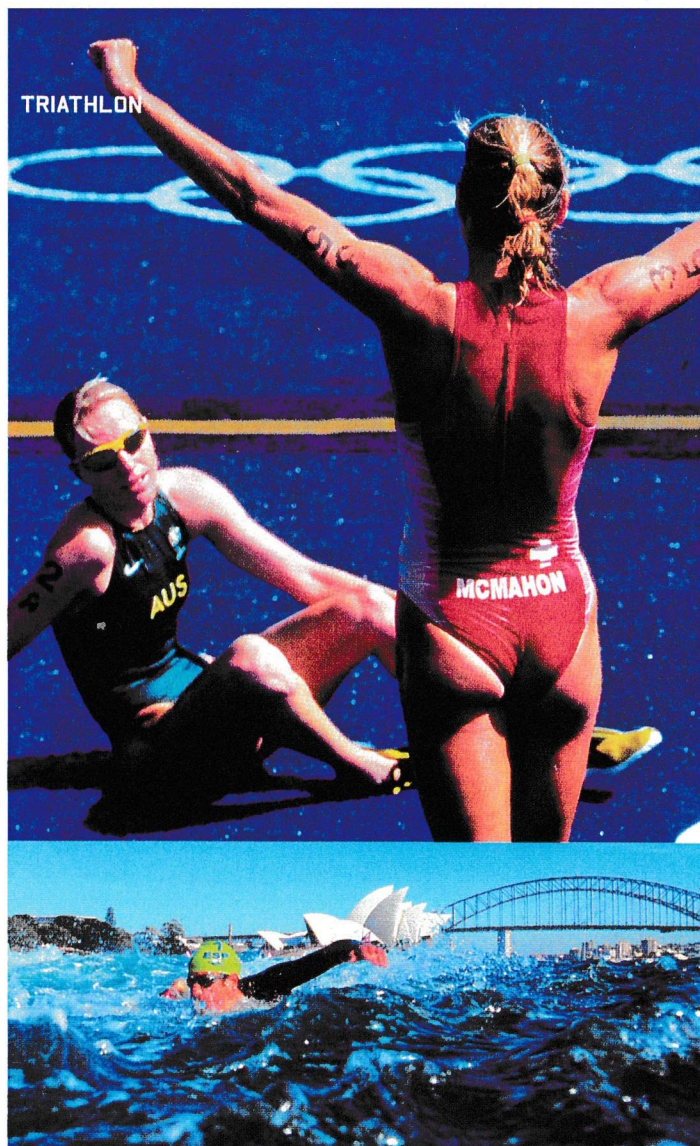
Interestingly, top competitive cyclists usually avoid running as it trains the wrong leg muscles, causing tightness. US Olympic gold medallist Rebecca Twigg Whitehead even avoids walking anything other than short distance as she says the motion tightens her leg muscles and hurts her pedalling style. However, that said, she experimented one winter off-season using running as her main exercise. She won a world championship gold medal the following summer.

Variety may sometimes be all that is required rather than additional training in one sport. Using the seasons to add some timely change to your schedule may be all that is needed to boost your main sport.

It is important to go about changing your weekly goals in the right way. The wrong way to do it for example would be to devote equal amounts of time to each sport every day. You could try a hard workout in one sport followed by a mini workout in another (or none at all) then change the pattern for the following day.

The combination of the three sports can be time-consuming. Top triathletes minimise the time aspect by getting the majority of their aerobic training from the one sport and combine short quality workouts from the other two. Others (including Rebecca Twigg Whitehead, mentioned above) find that specialising in different sports according to the season helps improve their performance. This training technique is perhaps the hardest to adopt, as your muscles will probably be a bit sore while they adjust to a new activity.





TRIATHLON

Only us  
triathletes  
understand

> Incompatible muscle training is not a problem if you are tuned in to the needs of your body. Unless you have a triathlete coach, which is not the case for most of us, it is up to you to decide the best method of training. There is no single universal answer. Trying to find the correct formula keeps coaches and athletes continuously experimenting. Some people find that concentrating on their slowest sport helps to improve overall performance. Most importantly, listen to your body and pay attention to the signals it provides. Plenty of stretching and massage will help avoid problems in this area.

One last tip, get more sleep. As obvious as it sounds, this is often difficult to do, especially with established daily routines. During the weeks when your training is intense, you may find that going to bed earlier and sleeping for longer helps you regain energy. An extra snooze at the weekend may also be beneficial.

The next step, should you decide to attempt a triathlon, is to design a tailor-made training programme. This should be based on things like how ambitious you are, the time you can devote to it, your individual strengths and the distance you want to concentrate on. Details and competitor information can be obtained from the British Triathlon Association.

Finally, if the advantages of triathlon training alone have not been enough to convince you to have a go, then perhaps the awards may offer some encouragement. Award ceremonies are held at all national championships with a recommended prize purse of at least £1,000. So, what have you got to lose? **Rf**

For further information contact the British Triathlon Association, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire. Tel: 01530 414 234