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Swim Exit

Exit the swim and peel off your neoprene in double-quick time? **Dan Bullock** shows you how



Dan Bullock

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For years, tri coaches have preached the importance of incorporating brick sessions into your training regime. And for good reason. Training the body to be able to cope with the strange sensation of switching from bike to run is essential to help with a smooth second transition (T2). But the first transition (T1) often gets overlooked – even though many would argue that T1 is harder than T2 and is integral to setting you up for a successful race. The main points to consider in this first phase are as follows...

- Navigating a clear path through a sea of triathletes looking for the same exit.
- Changing from being horizontal in the water to vertical, and experiencing the dizziness that usually comes with it.
- Removing your wetsuit (more on page 9).
- Unfamiliarity of the transition area (but not if you've arrived early and practised!).
- Feeling sluggish on the bike for a while as you warm up the legs.

Vascular shunting

In this feature we're going to focus on the second and fifth point. First up is the swim exit. When moving from the horizontal swim position to the vertical run position, the

blood is draining from the arms and shoulders and weaving its way to the legs. This draining effect can leave you feeling dizzy and light-headed, making the whole process that much more difficult.

'Vascular shunting' is the term used to describe blood moving from one area of the body that was working hard previously, to the new area that's now performing said work. Obviously, any muscle doing a lot of work needs a greater oxygen supply. If suddenly one area of the body stops working and another starts, the body needs to shift blood here, and this takes some time.

You can, nonetheless, improve the rate at which the body adapts to this through practice, by conditioning your body to get blood from one set of muscles to another.

Run before you bike

The first step to getting comfortable with this concept is to add a swim exit and short run into an open-water training session. A popular, if tough, main set we perform at our Swim for Tri open-water venues includes 6 x 150m strong swims, with an exit and a 100m run without rest. Obviously, conditions will permit what's feasible at where you practise, but with some kind of jetty and some helpers you should be able to recreate the following:

- Small waves go on the start signal and swim hard for 150m.
- Coaches help swimmers exit.
- Swimmers practise releasing Velcro flap and zip. But not a full removal!



Get ready for the bike by kicking harder in the last 200m of the swim to get the blood flowing

T1 is perhaps the hardest of the two transitions, as you battle dizziness, wetsuit removal and heavy legs

- We find it's easier if athletes leave hats and goggles on until they reach their bike. There's a very good chance that you'll get them stuck in a wetsuit sleeve if you attempt to remove the upper body with your cap and goggles in your hand.
- Athletes then run the 100m back to the starting pontoon where a coach will re-zip their suit and start them on the next swim.

On your bike

So often biking off the swim is just not practical, or the opportunity is just not there to practise. In a gym, with a spin bike and a running machine, you can nail T2 quite easily. T1 isn't as simple. But if your local gym has a pool, try laying out your kit in your locker for a fast, but safe, exit from the pool. Then swim kit off, gym kit on and hit one of the spin bikes asap.

Better yet, look for an Endless pool with turbos available so you can hop onto your own bike straight after a fitness swim. Many people do a long ride after open-water swims, but it takes at least 20mins to get changed and organised, and you end up losing some of the effect of a 'real race' transition.

You can certainly recreate the intensity of a swim exit and entry into T1, as described above, but it's so much harder to get quickly out on the bike. Without question this is a tricky discipline to organise, but even without the actual getting-on-a-bike part, practising the swim exit will really benefit your bike performance. This is especially true of shorter-distance races where, if racing

competitively, hitting the bike leg with a whimper will harm your overall result.

Leg warmers

If you're a regular 'trier', you'll probably have already experienced that heavy feeling in your legs as it takes them a little while to warm up post swim. It might well be the case that you've had a good swim but then your bike performance suffers as you're unable to hit top speed during the first part of your ride.

Often, it's best to start kicking your legs harder for the last 200m of the swim section. This should help to redistribute some bloodflow down into the legs.

But you need to be careful that this kick action doesn't slow your swim due to poor position or kicking too hard and breaking your streamlined profile. Also, a fraction too much movement from the knee and you'll add drag. This then creates more work for the arms, as they have to pull a poor body position through the water. As you increase your leg kick, you also run the risk of cramping more.

Practise, practise, practise

Practising your exits from water will help you control the dizzy, unpleasant sensation on race day as you're more prepared for the entry into T1. Get used to getting vertical after long swims and the effect won't be as detrimental. And by practising your transition into and out of T1, your first 20mins on the bike will be speedy, comfortable and powerful. **E20**



Mock race

If you have the flexibility at your nearest open-water venue, with some marker buoys you can recreate mini courses and exit procedures. (This should also encourage you to check out the race course prior to race day.)

For example, in the run-up to the London Triathlon, we focus on the unusual procedure of a full wetsuit removal on the dockside. Athletes perform a longer swim to finish the session with (400m plus), before exiting and executing a full wetsuit removal. We then offer plastic bags for the wetsuit that's then carried on a longer run into the imaginary Excel Building!

Getting used to the elevated heart rate once upright, keeping focussed and going through the 'find-the-zip' ritual really prepares you for a smooth exit on race day. The ability to arrive at your bike calm and relaxed will help you to a smooth, safer first transition.



If you've practised the swim exit, and entering and exiting T1, you'll be raring to go on the bike