

THE MAGIC OF MULTISPORT

Bored of your workouts? Inject variety and excitement into your training when you take up a new multisport

Words: Jo Ebsworth

You've heard of triathlon and duathlon. But what about aquathlon, swimrun and aquabike? You might not know it yet, but these are all examples of 'multisport': the term used for endurance races consisting of two or more sports.

Various forms of swimming, running and cycling – think mountain biking and trail running, as well as cycling and running on the flat – feature in multisport, but some lesser-known events incorporate activities such as rowing, cross-country skiing and even kayaking.

So, if you're looking to learn a new skill or set yourself an exciting challenge, read on to discover some of the most popular multisports and how you can give them a go. We guarantee you'll identify an event that will play to your strengths and weaknesses, and take your fitness to new heights!

SOCIAL BENEFITS

According to Kirsten Howells, a passionate triathlete and also a coach at Triathlon Coaching (triathloncoachinguk.com), when someone asks her why they should take up a multisport, her answer is: 'Why the hell not?!' Kirsten adds: 'To me, getting involved in multisport is an absolute no-brainer because the physical, mental, emotional and social benefits are endless. You've got nothing to lose, and only everything to gain.'

While many of us tend to find one activity we're naturally good at and stick with it, moving in the same repetitive patterns can, over time, put a strain on certain joints, muscles and ligaments of the body. This can eventually lead to injury. However, training across multiple sporting disciplines helps to keep your mind and training fresh – and your body always guessing.

'Exercising in a variety of activities is a much more holistic way to train,' explains Howells. 'A keen runner with strong legs and glutes will also develop great core and upper body



'It could take months, even a year, to prepare for a race, but remember it's all about the journey'

strength when they add swimming into the equation. Equally, balancing out runs with a non-impact sport such as cycling or swimming can give your body the break it needs to rest, recuperate and ultimately boost overall athletic growth.'

And that's nothing to say of the amazing community you'll become a part of when you join a multisport club; the incredible highs you'll experience after finishing an event surrounded by supportive spectators; and the beautiful scenery you'll enjoy as you train outdoors in nature, Howells adds.

MASS APPEAL

If the thought of training across three disciplines to take part in a triathlon has always seemed overwhelming and – let's be honest – expensive, now's your chance to get involved in a multisport, whatever your age or current ability.

Multisport has never been more inclusive. Aquabike, featuring swimming and cycling, was created so that people with injuries from high-impact exercise could take part

in multisport without having to run. And Aquathlon, made up of swimming and running, was born when triathlon race organisers realised the difficulty of transporting bikes to events could prevent people from taking part.

Shorter 'super sprint' events are increasingly popping up to encourage novice exercisers to train for and participate in events.

There has also been a rise in events featuring indoor swimming in pools instead of open water swimming for nervous swimmers.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Once you've settled on your perfect multisport, your first step should be to get a training plan. 'You might want to consider hiring a coach to create a personalised plan that matches your goals and fits in with your life,' advises Howells. Find a triathlon coach at British Triathlon (britishtriathlon.org) to create a programme for your chosen multisport. 'Many coaches now have the ability to provide online training programmes and performance analysis,' adds Howells. 'I have one client training for an Ironman while working on and training in the gym of an oil rig, which shows you don't have to live in the countryside.'

Join a club to put your training into practice. If you can't find a club near you, join clubs that cater for the individual sports you like, be it open water swimming (swimming.org), running (goodrunguide.co.uk) or cycling (britishcycling.org). Learn how to manage transitions later by attending dedicated training days.

Sign up for an event at findarace.com to boost motivation. Allow enough time to get race fit – it could take months, even a year to prepare, but it's all about the journey.

'It doesn't matter if you're not the faster swimmer, cyclist or runner. What matters is applying yourself and seeing what you can achieve when you put your mind to it,' says Howells. 'Once you cross that finish line you'll never look back – that's probably why I'm seeing such a rise of women in their 40s, 50s and 60s who are taking up multisport!'



YOUR GUIDE TO MULTISPORT EVENTS



'IT WAS THE MOST AMAZING EXPERIENCE'

Lucy Pye is a retail manager from Dromore Co Down, Northern Ireland; @pye.lucy

'A keen runner, my multisport journey began when I joined a triathlon club and got into adventure racing. After seeing a Swimrun event on TV, where competitors ran over mountainous trails and swam across beautiful rivers, I felt a real desire to take part, and spent five years hoping to get to a start line. After crossing the finish line at my first event last year – the Breca Buttermere Swimrun, featuring 22 transitions and a 2195ft ascent – I cried with joy. It was the most amazing experience and even the constant rain on the day couldn't dampen my spirits. I'd tell anyone who wants a new challenge to try Swimrun.'



SWIMRUN

Born from a drunken bet between four Swedish friends in 2002 who challenged each other to traverse the 75km Stockholm archipelago (a string of 26 islands), Swimrun involves multiple legs of continuous running and swimming with a partner who must stay within ten metres of you. There are no transition areas, so participants wear the same special shoes and wetsuit throughout; loveswimrun.co.uk

WINTER TRIATHLON

Winter used to be a time of rest for most triathletes, but not so anymore. A Winter Triathlon consists of running, mountain biking and cross-country skiing, with the first two segments on as much snow as possible. Course distances are set on the day of the race to achieve a winning time of around 80-90 minutes, taking into account all the latest snow conditions; triathlon.org

AQUATHLON

Consisting of a swim, followed by a run, Aquathlon was developed to eliminate the need to find courses long enough to accommodate lengthy triathlon cycling legs, and remove the difficulty and cost of transporting bikes to events. Standard open water aquathlons involve a 750m swim and 5km run. Pool-based aquathlons are also held using a 400m swim/5k run formula, known as a 'splash and dash'; uktriathlon.co.uk

TRIATHLON

Triathlons involve three disciplines where you swim, then cycle and finish with a run. Various distances for all abilities are available from the Super Sprint (400m swim/10km bike/2.5km run) through to a Full Ironman distance (3.8km swim/180km bike/42km run). Age-group triathlons also offer the opportunity for anyone between 16-80+ to represent Great Britain at events across the world; britishtriathlon.org

'THE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS KEEP ME GOING'

Clare Bryan is an executive assistant from Warwick;
@clare_does_tri

'I got into running, and later, cycling after hitting 30 and realising I was overweight and generally unhealthy. To keep my training momentum going, it felt like an obvious step to throw in some swimming and take up triathlon. It was all about the weight loss in the early days but, while I love being physically fit now, it's the benefits to my mental health that really keep me going. I can guarantee I am going to have a better day if I start it with a run, ride or swim. And I have yet to find a better feeling than pushing your body to go that bit further or that bit faster than you ever thought you could.'



BIATHLE

A Biathle event is made of three legs, consisting of a run, a swim and a final run to the finish line. Unlike Swimrun, which continuously alternates running and swimming, a Biathle features transition zones to change your kit and equipment. It was created to give Modern Pentathletes the chance to practice the swim and run parts of a pentathlon in real race conditions; pentathlongb.org


AQUABIKE

Aquabike consists of two legs, starting with a swim and ending with a bike ride. It was developed in the US as a way for former triathletes suffering from knee pain to keep competing without enduring high-impact activity. Half Ironman and Full Ironman distances are available alongside Sprint and Olympic distances; aquabike.events

CROSS TRIATHLON

Cross triathlon, also known as X-tri, is an off-road form of triathlon. Races typically take place over a 1km open water swim, a 20-30km mountain bike and a 6-10km trail run: distances for off-road triathlons are less relevant compared to road triathlons, due to courses featuring tricky obstacles, and steep climbs and descents requiring greater technical ability; xterraplanet.com

DUATHLON

If you fear the open water, duathlon could be for you. Consisting of three legs, you run first, then cycle, then run again. Beginners can enter a Sprint distance race of a 5km run, 20km bike and 2.5km run. The Standard distance consists of a 10km run, 40km bike, 5km run; londonduathlon.com 

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