

# The First Time Finisher's™ Triathlon Guide

How to Complete Your First Triathlon  
While Staying Injury Free, Enjoying Your  
Workouts and Feeling Energetic and Fresh  
after Crossing Your First Finish Line.

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The author relaxes after completing the Escape From Alcatraz Triathlon, CA  
1.5 mile Swim in San Francisco Bay  
18 mile Bike through Golden Gate Park  
8 Mile Run on Baker Beach with the Infamous "Sand Ladder"

## **Welcome to the First Time Finisher's™ Triathlon Guide!**

This FREE guide you are about to read was created from questions from women and men just like you--those who are planning to complete their first triathlon. Before you let me help you enjoy that thrill of crossing the finish line for the first time, here are three simple things you need to know:

1. Everyone has questions about how to complete their first triathlon
2. Everyone has doubts about whether they are doing the right type of training
3. Anyone can complete their first triathlon with the right coaching and guidance

To help you complete your journey, i've put together this introductory guide, and hope that you will consider making the investment in my complete "First Time Finishers Plan"™ for helping you get across that finish line.

This guide was created from actual questions (and answers) that I've received when doing lectures and clinics teaching people how to complete their first triathlon. You'll find that many of your own questions are already answered or addressed right here, and if not, I will show you where to go to get more information about how to become a First Time Finisher™

### **About the Author**

#### **aka Why You Should Bother Listening to Me**



My name is Suzanne Atkinson, MD, and I am a USA Triathlon and USA Cycling Certified Coach as well as Emergency Room Doctor. Triathlon became a passion of mine as I looked for a way to introduce cross training into my fitness lifestyle after finishing medical school and going into my Emergency Medicine Residency. I completed my first formal triathlon during my internship in 2002 and started coaching triathletes in 2006.

Since then I've coached dozens of athletes through their first competitive triathlons and bike races, and firmly believe that if you WANT to finish your first triathlon, you CAN and WILL. Many people, however, don't know how or where to start. I receive dozens of emails with questions about training and coaching and simply can't answer every single one of them in as much detail as I would like. I never thought that there would be this many people looking for the information I was already teaching and sharing with my athletes.

Since graduating college I've been teaching and coaching people and helping them accomplish goals they once thought were unreachable. I started with Outward Bound School teaching wilderness expedition skills to teenagers and young adults, taught Rock Climbing and Kayaking Classes to groups like Breast Cancer Survivors and Vietnam Veterans, and now as a physician and coach, I get to help people create and follow training plans to reach their personal and competitive goals in cycling and triathlon.

I find such incredible gratification by helping athletes and soon-to-be-athletes that I want to help you as well. This free eBook is guaranteed to get you started training on the right foot so that you know you are spending your time doing the right type of training.

I know that you'll have many questions about this book and about finishing your first triathlon. Feel free to send me your questions to [coach@forgingthetriathlete.com](mailto:coach@forgingthetriathlete.com) I read every single email that I get, but can't always reply...what I CAN do however, is answer commonly asked questions on my website as well as through my newsletter Forging the Athlete (you are automatically subscribed to it when you downloaded this guide).

I also do a limited number of free 15 minute, recorded phone consultations which helps me understand your needs better. Everything I learn from you goes back into creating more helpful information for other triathletes soon to follow in your shoes. I am certain that I can help you plan and complete your first triathlon, regardless of where you are doing it!

Just as I've helped dozens of other people complete their first triathlon, I'd like to be a part of your experience as you train and race your first triathlon and become a First Time Finisher™.

As we progress in our journey, I want you to keep just one thing in mind...the most important thing I learned during my years at Outward Bound...*we are capable of more than we think we are.*

Let me say that one more time, because it's vital that you and I agree on this:

**We are capable of more than we think we are.**

(This means you!)



**Successful First Time Finisher™ of IronMan Florida and his gal pals.**

# First Time Finisher's Triathlon Guide

*Leave all the afternoon for exercise and recreation, which are as necessary as reading. I will rather say more necessary because health is worth more than learning.*

*Thomas Jefferson*

So you're wondering what it would take to finish your first triathlon. You're wondering if you have the skill, the endurance and the mental effort required to train for a new accomplishment. Well I've got great news for you. If you've even considered it, you've got what it takes! One of my all time favorite athletes that I worked with was an 81 year old man who wanted to complete his first triathlon in the fall.

He had a medical condition that required a pacemaker, so he asked his cardiologist if he thought it was a good idea. His doctor's response was, "You'd better start training!" After speaking with him, let me tell you, he is MOTIVATED! This man wants nothing more than to be able to earn a blue ribbon in his age group in his first triathlon. He has many motivators, one of which includes a mental escape from the stress of caring for his ailing wife.

Your motivators may be different, but the fact that you are reading this book shows that you have an internal drive and motivation to try new and challenging physical activities. The most vital components of being able to train and complete your first triathlon are ***motivation and desire!***

***A champion needs a motivation above and beyond winning.***

***Pat Riley***

The First Time Finisher's Guide to Triathlon will walk you through a three month training plan to complete your first sprint distance triathlon. The sprint distance is the perfect race for your first triathlon and typically consists of a 400 to 800 yard swim, 12-20 mile bike ride and a 3 mile run.

The full 3 month plan can be found in the appendix for you to print out and post somewhere that you can see it everyday. By printing out and following this plan, you are agreeing to the Steel City Endurance, Ltd. waiver and release of liability included in Appendix B.

On the download page for this eBook is a valuable transition diagram, be certain that you download that as well. Just print it out, double sided, cut it in half and you'll have two copies of the diagram.

After you read this guide for the first time, plan backwards from the date of your triathlon so that "Race Day" corresponds to the date of your race. number the weeks on your calendar backwards from "12" (Race week) to "1" (the first week of your plan) in order to set your training calendar. If you have more or less time until your race, I'll be sending out some tips by email on how to plan.

# Equipment - The Right Gear for the First Time Triathlete

*It matters little how much equipment we use;  
it matters much that we be masters of all we do use.*

*Sam Abell*

## **What kind of equipment does the First Time Finisher need?**

Your first triathlon can be accomplished with a minimum amount of equipment. While it can eventually become an expensive pursuit, as you start to buy specialized equipment, most of us already have the equipment we need to train for and complete a triathlon. The following is a list of the minimum required equipment to complete your first triathlon:

1. Swimsuit & goggles
2. Running shoes
3. Bicycle (the one you currently own) and a helmet.

Let's discuss each of those items separately.

### **Swimsuit:**

OK, as much fun as it would be, we're just not allowed (in most cases) to swim naked. So you need a swimsuit. For summer races, many people do the entire triathlon in their swim suit, including the bike & run without changing or adding additional clothing. There are a lot of options for what type of clothing to wear once you're done with the swim and we'll discuss that further on.

**Goggles:**

It's simply impossible to swim an efficient freestyle stroke if you are not willing to put your face & head into the water. Goggles allow you to do so while still observing your surroundings, whether you're in a pool or a pond. It's also possible to do a triathlon swim using breaststroke, sidestroke or even backstroke, but I still recommend goggles to make the experience more comfortable. As a young swimmer, I had a terrible time finding goggles that didn't leak. "Goggle technology" has advanced since then, and there are many styles available that are leak proof, even for contact lens wearers.

**Running Shoes:**

The best thing you can do for your body and joints is to go to a reputable running store and get fitted for shoes that fit your build, foot shape and running style. I have bought my last 4 pairs of shoes from Fleet Feet near South Hills Village Mall, but I'm sure there are other stores as well. A good pair of running shoes will help minimize movement inside the shoe, help control pronation & supination of the foot and provide cushioning from harsh road surfaces.

**Bicycle:**

Any bicycle will do. The bicycling you currently own or can borrow from your mom, dad or kid brother will work fine. My first triathlon was done on a 15 year old, steel framed mountain bike with hubs so old that the wheels ground to a stop within three revolutions. I viewed it as extra training resistance. ;) Of course a bike that fits you will be most comfortable, but there is no need to go out and spend \$500 or more on a new bike just for this event. If you are looking for an excuse to buy a good bike, however, this is a great opportunity to go shopping! But don't let the absence of a fancy carbon fiber time trail bike stop you from training.

**Helmet:**

Absolutely mandatory. Both by USA Triathlon Rules as well as by me. Your brain is your most valuable asset. Even a simple fall on a bicycle can result in a serious head injury. Bicycle helmets are designed to absorb impact that would otherwise be transmitted to your skull and your brain on the inside. Because a bruise in your brain can't swell like a bruise on your arm or leg, for example, even small head injuries can be devastating.

You must wear your helmet at all times, and that includes rides on "quiet" streets, trails, paved paths and even a quick spin to check your current tune up. As an ER physician, I've seen far too many head injuries and the devastation that they cause. The price range on helmets starts at a very affordable range and goes up to several hundred dollars. You can find one in your price range at your local bicycle shop.

Never buy a used helmet that you don't know the history of. Even one fall is enough to disrupt the helmet's ability to absorb future impacts. A helmet should be replaced after any crash. If you don't own one, you need to go out and buy one now.

As helmets get more expensive, they tend to get lighter and more comfortable. But the helmets on the low end of the price range are just as safe as long as they pass the industry standard. Stop into any bike shop to ask and try them on. A more comfortable helmet is one that you will look forward to wearing, and who knows, it may be the helmet that saves your life!

# Training to be a First Time Finisher

*In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Volumes of material, both in print and online, are available on this topic. If don't want to do the thinking and just want to train, my 3 month "First time finishers" plan already has this worked out for you. However if you would like some insight into the principals, here are some basics:

## The Three Elements of Training that help you improve your performance

Positive changes in your fitness require physical stress, followed by recovery and repair. There are three basic elements of training that can be manipulated in a variety of ways to create the right stresses at the right times to achieve a positive benefit.

1. Frequency
2. Duration
3. Intensity

After becoming familiar with these three fundamental variables, you can manipulate each of them one at a time as needed to achieve further progressive overload. Systematic application of progressive overload, followed by rest and recovery results in increased fitness specific to your training.

The 12 Week Sprint Triathlon Training Program included in this ebook is a basic plan that takes these elements into account, primarily duration. As the weeks progress, you will see that the duration of each workout slowly increases, with adequate time for rest and recovery. I've already worked out the progression for you so all you have to do is follow the plan.

If you are following another training plan, you'll need to look over these three fundamentals and make sure that each one is taken into account, but like I said, I've already done this for you in the 12 week plan included at the end of this book.

I want to go over two additional things that are vital for a successful training plan. These two things may seem contrary to each other. Rest and Consistency Let me explain what I mean by that.

## **Reach Your Goals Sooner with Consistency**

*"We are what we continuously do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit."*

*-Aristotle*

Achieving your short and long term goals, enjoying your sport and having progressive improvements in your skills, strength, speed and endurance require consistency in your training. Downtime suffered from illness, injury and loss of motivation result in a loss of fitness, and the need to spend time rebuilding your fitness. It is estimated that the time it takes to rebuild fitness after a layoff period is approximately twice the time that was taken off. If you decide to chill out at the end of summer climbing season with a month of baseball playoffs, football preseason and beer, it will take you another two months to get back to your end of summer fitness level. If you were planning to make any progress over the winter or get out on the ice, that's sure not a great way to start. Consistent training, not extreme training is the path to the highest personal level of fitness.

## Rest Is a Mandatory Training Component

*Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.*

**Thomas Dekker (1572 - 1632)**

Consistent training, however, does not mean constant training. Fitness is actually gained only while resting. Workouts breakdown muscle tissue, deplete storage supplies and create waste products that your body needs to remove and recycle. Growth hormone is released only during REM sleep, about 30 minutes after falling to sleep. A rested athlete looks forward to workouts, enjoys exercising, feels sharp, coordinated and in control and grows stronger. An overtired/over trained athlete requires extreme willpower just to finish workouts, is sluggish, recovers poorly from workouts and stops benefiting from workout out altogether. Overtraining/under resting mimics 5-HT depletion, the same chemical pathways shown to be depleted in depression.

Everyone has different internal motivations for training, and it's not unusual for people training for a triathlon to be the type of person who is constantly looking for a new challenge...you probably have many other responsibilities in your life, and may be trying to cram in as much training as you possibly can (or at least you've thought about it).

Rest can and needs to be incorporated in many ways and on many levels in your training plan, including adequate sleep, easy training days, days off, entire recovery weeks, and an interruption of structured training at the end of a season.

## How do I get started?

*Life leaps like a geyser for those who drill through the rock of inertia.*

*Alexis Carrel*

My 3 month First Time Finisher's plan has daily workouts that specify the activity and the duration. If you follow the plan, your workouts will begin small, gradually build in duration, you will get adequate rest & recovery and you will be physically and mentally prepared to complete your first sprint distance triathlon. Naturally if you are interested in doing other events, you can modify this plan, or look into personalized coaching.

Let's get right down to business with details about your first month of training. The training plan is designed with a first time triathlete in mind. If you can do the following, then you should be successful following this plan. If not, don't let that discourage you. Three months is ample time to get up to speed in all three disciplines.

- You can ride a bike,
- You can swim 25-50 yards without stopping
- You can do twenty minutes of a run/walk combination.

Feel free to modify the plan to your own strengths and weaknesses. if you are already a strong swimmer for example, you may want to devote a little more time to running or cycling. Each week features two workouts in each sport for a total of six workouts per week. You should take at least one full day of rest each week, feel free to move this day to whatever suits your schedule.

I will go over the first week of each month in detail in this free eBook. For the subsequent weeks, use the plan as a guide and if you have questions about anything, please email me. While I don't have time to answer every email I get individually, I do read them all, and I will send out a group reply or a new posting on my website with answers to common questions that people ask. Before moving on, please print out the training plan so that you can refer to it as needed during the descriptions of the workouts.

# Week by Week Training for the First Time Finisher

## Week One

Week one requires a total of about 2 1/2 hours of workouts.

### Swimming:

Two workouts of 400 and 500 yards. Swim any combination of lengths to total the correct workout distance. You can alternate strokes if you like, but if you would like to do the swim in all freestyle, then simply take your time and rest as needed in between lengths. If you can only swim 25 yards at a time, then simply do sets of four lengths and do four sets total for your first workout. The second workout do five sets of four lengths each.

Examples:

**Swim 1:** Warmup 4 x 25 yards with long slow strokes resting as needed. Main set: 4 x 25 yards at a moderate effort, rest 10 seconds after each length. Rest for 60 seconds then repeat.

Cooldown: 4 x 25 yards focus on good form, resting as needed. Total 400 yards

**Swim 2:** Warmup 4 x 25 yards with long slow strokes resting as needed. Main set: 4 x 25 yards at a moderate effort, rest 10 seconds after each length. Rest 60 seconds. 4x 25 yards moderate effort, rest for 5 seconds between each length. Rest for 60 seconds then repeat first set.

Cooldown: 4 x 25 yards focus on good form, resting as needed. Total 500 yards

If you can't swim at least 25 yards without stopping, or if you would like to improve your swim technique, consider having someone at your local swim club take a look at your form, or take a

few private lessons. Even just one private lesson is frequently enough to fast forward your swim stroke to a more efficient, and thus more fun way to workout.

## **Biking**

*A note about safety:* You should be prepared for the most common biking incident which is a flat tire. Carry with you a patch kit, a pump and/or CO2 cartridges. All of this and a small tool set can be stored in a small under-the-seat zippered pouch. I put a business card with my emergency contact information in the pouch as well. Always wear a helmet and carry some type of identification with you. A cell phone is also a great backup safety device that you'll be glad to have when you need it.

**Bike #1:** 30 minutes of easy riding. Get used to your bike, change gears frequently to become accustomed to how they work. Practice pedaling fast and slow and note the relationship between your gear selection and how fast or slow you can pedal. Have fun with this ride, see if you can get a friend to come along.

**Bike #2:** 50 minutes of easy riding. For this ride, focus on staying in a gear that lets you pedal at a cadence of around 90 rpm. You don't need a fancy bike computer for this, just count the number of pedal revolutions you make in 10 seconds and multiply by six. Fifteen revolutions in six seconds equals 90 revolutions per minute. This may seem difficult at first, but if you practice it will get easier and it will pay off in the long run.

## **Running**

I realize that running comes naturally for some people and for others is extremely difficult. The best thing you can do is start off with a good fitting pair of running shoes. If your shoes are more than 6 months old or have more than 300-500 miles on them, buy yourself a pair of new shoes from a good running store. Your ankles, knees, hips and back will thank you!

**Run 1:** The first run is an easy 20 minute jog. You should keep your effort at a "conversational" level. If you are breathing too hard to say more than a few words at a time, you need to slow down. If you are not able to run for 20 minutes continuously, then alternate running and walking as needed. A 5 minute brisk walk to warm up followed by alternating 2 minutes running & walking five times, followed by a 5 minute cooldown will add up to 20 minutes. Treat yourself to a tall glass of water when you are done!

**Run 2:** This is a slightly longer run of 25 minutes. If you are following the run/walk plan, continue with 5 minute walking warmup and cool down with 15 minutes of alternating running and walking inbetween. Try to slowly increase the amount of time you are able to continuously run.

### **Weeks 2, 3 & 4**

Continue with weeks 2 through 4 in the plan by following the same suggestions as above. If you have a good background in one of the disciplines, you may want to continue your regular training if it is currently more than what I've recommended here. Keep in mind that this plan was designed for the new triathlete in mind. The truth is that nearly all triathletes have some background in one of the three sports. If so, consider doing one extra workout per week in your weakest sport, and simply "maintaining" your current level of fitness in your best sport. On race day, you'll be glad you devoted the extra time. Coming up is Month two and additional topics such as dealing with sore muscles, staying organized so that you can fit in your workouts, recovery and more.

## **The Middle Stretch - Fortifying your Endurance Month 2**

In the last section, I introduced you to the idea of training for your first triathlon. We reviewed the necessary equipment, basic elements of training in order to see continued improvement and reduce the chance of injury and how to get started with the first weeks of your training plan. If you have been following the First Time Finisher's plan, you will currently be swimming 700-900 yards per workout, biking for a little over an hour at a time, and running up to 45 minutes on weekends.

*In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself  
within a dark wood where the straight way was lost.  
Dante Alighieri*

Now I would like to discuss a few topics that may be on your mind, and introduce a new type of workout called a "brick".

### **Sore muscles**

Muscle soreness is caused by small amounts of damage to the muscle fibers from performing new activities. It is generally a good sign at the beginning of an exercise program indicating that you are giving your muscles new challenges. Muscle soreness shouldn't last more than 2-3 days, and if it lasts longer than that, it's a sign that you may have gone just a little overboard on your initial workouts. If that's the case, learn from the experience. Make your next few workouts very gentle, just enough to get the blood flowing and wake up the muscles, but not so intense that you risk doing additional damage to muscles that have not yet fully recovered.

### **Sore joints**

Ligaments and tendons take longer to adjust to new levels of physical activity due to relatively less blood flow compared to muscles. This is one of several reasons why you should begin a new exercise program slowly and ease into it. Soreness around your joints is not something you

should try to "work through" by continuing to progress your exercise program. Take some additional time off, decrease the length of your next workout or skip the next workout entirely. When in doubt, slow down or leave it out!

### **Organization**

Being organized for your workouts is no different from being organized in other areas of your life. If it takes extra time to gather your workout clothes, find your running shoes, biking helmet, water bottles, stop watch , etc, you will lose precious workout time and probably your motivation to workout as well.

Take the time each evening to prepare what you'll need for the next day's workout. This is especially true if you are trying to do a workout in the morning. For running, set out your running shoes, clean socks, a workout shirt, hat, sunglasses and your ipod (if you use one). For swimming, have your (clean, dry) swim suit, swim cap if you have long hair, goggles, your workout and a dry towel ready to go in a mesh duffel or bag. Biking requires the most equipment and searching for these items is likely to zap the motivation for your workout as well. Be sure you collect the following items in one place: Helmet, cycling shorts, cycling shoes, gloves, bike computer, water bottles ready to fill, and pump up your tires to an appropriate pressure the night before.

Immediately after each workout, change your clothes putting your dirty workout clothes in the hamper, place your shoes where you can grab them for the next workout, empty and rinse out your water bottles especially if you used a drink mix, put your bike away and hang your suit and or towel up to dry.

Following these easy steps significantly improves the possibility of you completing your workouts rather than skipping them due to disorganization.

### **Costume**

Before the weekend comes I have visions of rising early, putting in a nice long bike ride, getting

home feeling a healthy sense of accomplishment by having my workout already accomplished. The rest of the day is mine, free to relax, read or hang out at a coffee shop.

But what usually happens is that I sleep in, take a shower, put on a comfy tie dye & sandals, fix a cup of tea, read the paper and dream about the perfect bike ride I'll take later in the day. Many weekends, I never get changed into my workout clothes and end up stressed about fitting in my 2 hour ride before the sun goes down. Assuming it doesn't rain in the afternoon.

*Costume* is the simple solution to this problem. Rather than think about your long workout as you struggle to get out from underneath your cozy covers, just think about putting on your "costume". Instead of slipping into your favorite Saturday T-shirt & jeans, slip right into your biking shorts and shoes. Once your that far, sitting down for a cup of tea is just a nice prelude to your morning ride, rather than another step in procrastination. Getting onto your bike and out the door is easy once you're already dressed for it!

## **Bricks**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 3 month plan introduces a new type of workout called a "Brick". A brick is a workout that involves two of the triathlon sports performed back to back. For example a swim followed by a bike ride, or a bike ride followed by a run. It is important to practice these workouts since one of the main challenges of a triathlon is not necessarily competing in all three sports, but being able complete each leg immediately after finishing the first.

The bike to run transition is the most difficult to get used to if you have never tried it before. Your leg muscles are generally fatigued from biking and you are now asking them to start running! Normal sensations during this transition include a heavy feeling in your thighs, difficulty standing upright like you normally would during your run and a nagging doubt of whether or not you can finish the race. By incorporating a simple brick workout once a week in the last few weeks of your training, you will overcome each of these obstacles

Your first few brick workouts are easy, you simply put on some running shoes after finishing your bike workout and head out for an easy 10 minute jog, no more. You are trying to get your legs used to the idea of running after finishing a bike workout. For the best training effect, you need to begin your run within 10 minutes of finishing your bike. This is not a substitute for “two-a-days” where your intention would be a quality workout in each of two sports separated by several hours for recovery. The intention for these workouts is to deliberately fatigue your legs during the bike ride and immediately head out for a short run.

The three month plan calls for three of these bricks in weeks 7, 8 and 9. Just put on your running shoes after your mid-week ride and go for a 10 minute jog. You will begin to look forward to these short runs after your bike ride and find the “brick” sensation in your thighs is less and less noticeable after time!

This chapter I covered some topics relating to your new habit of triathlon training, presented some tips for fitting your workouts into a busy schedule, and introduced you to a new type of workout. Try out each of the previous tips this coming month to see which ones improve your motivation to train or give you more time. In the next chapter I will give you some tips on how to make your race day sport transitions seamless and fast.

## **The Final Stretch - Preparing for your Peak and Crushing Race Day Month 3**

Hello again, triathletes! By now you are well into the first 2 months of your triathlon training and are starting to believe in yourself. Congratulations! Did you think you would come this far? Remember what I talked about in the very beginning? *You are capable of more than you think you are!* You WILL finish your first triathlon. The past chapters I have discussed several

common questions and obstacles that everyone faces on the road to becoming a triathlete. The first chapter we discussed equipment and basic workouts. The second chapter we discussed some tips and tricks to stay motivated as well as introducing the “brick” workout. Now I want to discuss the “brick” workout just a little bit more, and talk about transitions.

In last earlier discussion of brick workouts, I suggested that you start with a ten-minute run following one of your weekly bike rides. If you have been doing this for the past four weeks, you should now be accustomed to the sensation of running on “tired” legs. Changing activities from biking to running requires the recruitment of your hamstrings, glutes, quads and calves in different proportions as well as a change in technique. The first ten minutes of the run is the hardest part for most triathletes. Congratulations, because you now have this most challenging part behind you!

### **Longer Bricks**

As you get closer to your goal race, in the last 2-3 weeks, you should begin to increase the length of your run. A great way to do this is to combine your short bike and short run into a full-length brick workout, instead of just the 10 minute run. If you are uncertain about how long to bike and run, aim for a 2:1 ratio. In other words, a 60 minute bike followed by a 20-30 minute run. If you've been doing the short 10 minute runs after your bikes up to this point, advancing to a 20-30 minute run should be no problem. This helps your body learn to keep drawing on the strength and endurance you have built up for your run, and forces you to practice pacing and nutrition for this part of the upcoming race.

## **Moving from Swim to Bike and Bike to Run. AKA Transitions**

*Life is one big transition.*

*Willie Stargell*

## Transitions

Transition is the period between each event. For a traditional triathlon, there is a swim to bike transition, known as “T1”, and a bike to run transition, known as “T2”. You should spend at least one session practicing each of these transitions in the week or two prior to your race.

Each athlete is usually given a small area for transition. At some races it's first come first served, and at other races, each athlete is given a numbered area that corresponds with your race number. You will pick up your race packet, and then find your number on the bike racks in order to locate your transition area. Usually the even and odd numbers alternate on each side of a metal or wooden bar that acts as support for your bicycle. In other words, if you are number “3”, number “1” will be to your left, number “5” to your right, and numbers “2” and “4” will be on the other side of the rack.

On the Download page is a transition layout diagram. Print it out, double sided and cut it in half. Now you've got two transition diagrams. Put one in your race bag for race day, and use the other for practice right now. The best way to practice your first transition is to lay out all your gear according to the diagram, starting with a small sized towel to “stake your claim” and place the rest of your gear. As you layout your transition area think of the order in which you will need your gear.

The first step in transition is to “rack your bike”. You can either rack it by the seat or by the handlebars. If you rack it by the seat, you can usually place the nose of the saddle over the rack with the front wheel touching down on YOUR SIDE of the bike rack. Likewise, if you decide to rack it by the handlebars, the brake levers are typically placed over the rack with your BACK wheel touching down on YOUR SIDE of the bike rack. Regardless of which way you rack your bike, the most important point (and a very misunderstood USA Triathlon rule), is that the wheel of your bike should touch down on YOUR SIDE of the rack. See the pattern here?

Some race directors will specify in the pre-race meeting that all bikes should be racked by the seat. But note that you can place your bike in the rack hanging by the seat and the front wheel could be touching down either away from you or towards you. The correct placement is the wheel touching down towards you. If this all sounds confusing just look at the diagram and photos. If it's still confusing you may just have to wait for your first race.

Next in transition area will be the items you need to transition from the swim to the bike. You will need to do the following:

- Exit the water and find your transition area
- Take off your wetsuit if wearing one
- Put on your bike shoes (will you wash your feet off? Will you wear socks?)
- Put on your bike helmet and fasten it.
- Put on your sunglasses.
- Run/walk with your bike to the mounting area.
- Get on your bike and go!

Your bike should be stocked with one or two full water bottles, and if you will be using any sports gels or bars on the bike leg, they need to be in a place where you won't forget them. (like placed inside your bike shoes).

Some people will also do a wardrobe change in T1. If you are wearing just a swimsuit for the swim, you will need to put on biking shorts and a shirt or cycling jersey. If you have invested in a "tri suit", you can wear the same suit for all three events, saving time during T1.

When you finish the bike leg, you will (usually) arrive back in the same transition area for "T2".

For T2, you will need to do the following:

- Dismount your bike at the dismount line
- Walk/run your bike back to your transition area
- Re-rack your bike without knocking any one else's bike over

- Change from biking shoes to running shoes
- Take off your bike helmet
- Be sure you have your race number on (pinned to your shirt or on a race belt)
- Go run!

Note a few important rules here, first, you must ALWAYS have your helmet on and buckled while riding the bike anywhere at the race venue. If you are caught riding your bike, even from your car to transition without your helmet on, you can be disqualified from the race (but usually you will just get a warning). Secondly, you are not allowed to ride your bike in the transition area. There will be a mount and a dismount line for the bike leg, which means you must practice running with your bike, steering either by the bars or by the seat.

So now that you know the steps, you've seen the diagram, gathered your things and laid them all out, the next step is to practice. The easiest way to do this is to practice T1 during one training session about 3 weeks before race day. Then practice T2 the following week about 2 weeks before race day. In the week before the race, get all of your gear together and practice both transitions, going for a short 10 minute bike ride followed by a 5 minute run. Repeat this transition from start to finish 3-4 times for a nice workout during which you can get your transition area techniques completely wired.

You may be wondering if you should practice the swim to bike transition by doing an actual swim. If you have the ability to do this at an outdoor pool or body of water, this is ideal. If it is impractical for you to do an actual swim, just get dressed in your swim suit, tri suit or wetsuit, and get soaked in your shower or your garden sprinkler.

After you're wet, start about 50 feet from your transition area set up. Do about 5-10 pushups to get your body working in that horizontal position. Then standup, jog towards your transition area and start your routine. Although you don't get in the swim, you still get the experience of

transitioning from horizontal to vertical as well as changing out of soaking wet clothing or suit and getting into your bike gear.

*Visualization is daydreaming with a purpose.*

*Bo Bennett*

If reading about transitions sounds stressful to you, all the more reason to try it before the race. Visualization and Mental rehearsal is invaluable. The idea is to reduce the amount of stress on race morning by practicing as much as possible and eliminating the unknown. You will still have a lot of excitement on race day morning. Do your best to channel this energy into a positive experience. Your main priorities for your first triathlon should be to have a good time, learn as much as possible and simply finish the race. It doesn't matter where you finish, because you can only control your own training and preparation.

Triathlon coaches have a saying that goes like this: "DFL is better than DNF is better than DNS". Translation: "Dead Friggin' Last is better than Did Not Finish is better than Did Not Start." If you show up for the race and participate, you are doing better than over 99% of the population who never even considered training for a triathlon. The most important part about all of this practice and training, however, is to have fun.

Good luck in your first triathlon, and give me feedback along the way! Either send me an email at [coach@forgingthetriathlete.com](mailto:coach@forgingthetriathlete.com) or leave comments on the website.

You get whatever accomplishment you are willing to declare.

Georgia O'Keeffe



Coach Suzanne; San Francisco Bay & Golden Gate Bridge, CA

This photo was taken the day before the Escape from Alcatraz Triathlon, after several months of training, positive mental visualization and working with my personal triathlon coach. See that smile on my face? That can be yours too, Just follow this plan!

## 12 Week Sprint Basic Triathlon Training Plan

Please note that this is a basic plan designed to build endurance in the novice triathlete in their 1st or 2nd year of the sport. Workout durations are based on projected "First Time Finisher" times. If you are able to complete this plan while remaining injury free, you should be successful in completing your first triathlon.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
<b>Week 1</b> 2h 30m	OFF	Swim 400 yd	Bike 30m	Run 20m	Swim 500 yd	Bike 50m	Run 25m
<b>Week 2</b> 2h 50m	OFF	Swim 500 yd	Bike 40m	Run 20m	Swim 600 yd	Bike 55m	Run 30m
<b>Week 3</b> 3h 05m	OFF	Swim 600 yd	Bike 45m	Run 25m	Swim 700 yd	Bike 60m	Run 35m
<b>Week 4</b> 2h 10m	OFF	Swim 400 yd	Bike 30m	Run 15m	Swim 500 yd	Bike 45m	Run 20m
<b>Week 5</b> 3h 10m	OFF	Swim 600 yd	Bike 50m	Run 20m	Swim 800 yd	Bike 70m	Run 40m
<b>Week 6</b> 3h 45m	OFF	Swim 700 yd	Bike 60m	Run 25m	Swim 900 yd	Bike 80m	Run 45m
<b>Week 7</b> 4h 05m	OFF	Swim 800 yd	Brick B 70m R 10m	Run 30m	Swim 1000 yd	Bike 90m	Run 50m
<b>Week 8</b> 2h 25m	OFF	Swim 600 yd	Brick B 30m R 10m	Run 20m	Swim 600 yd	Bike 50m	Run 25m
<b>Week 9</b> 4h 15m	OFF	Swim 800 yd	Brick B 60m R 10m	Run 30m	Swim 1100 yd	Bike 100m	Run 55m
<b>Week 10</b> 4h 25m	T1	Swim 900 yd	Brick B 70m R 35m	OFF	Swim 1200 yd	Bike 120m	Run 60m
<b>Week 11</b> 5h 10m	T2	Swim 750 yd	Brick B 65m R 30m	OFF	Swim 900 yd	Bike 90m	Run 45m
<b>Week 12</b> 2h 55m	T1 & T2	Swim 500 yd	Brick B 35m R 25m	OFF	S 250yd B 30m	R 10m Gear Check	<b>RACE!</b>

**ATHLETE WAIVER AND RELEASE FROM LIABILITY**

IN CONSIDERATION of being given the opportunity to participate in the **Steel City Endurance, Ltd.** training and racing program ("**Program**"), I, for myself, my personal representatives, assigns, heirs, and next of kin:

A. ACKNOWLEDGE, AGREE AND REPRESENT that I am fully aware that participating in any exercise program can be a potentially dangerous, hazardous activity, and I am specifically aware that the Program involves risks and dangers of serious bodily injury, including permanent disability, paralysis and death ("Risks"). I also fully understand that these Risks may be caused by my own actions, or inactions, the actions or inactions of others, the negligence of any Releasee named below, and that there may be other risks and social and economic losses either not known to me or not readily foreseeable at this time. I FULLY ACCEPT AND ASSUME ALL SUCH RISKS AND ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOSSES, COSTS, AND DAMAGES I INCUR AS A RESULT OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM.

B. HEREBY RELEASE, discharge, and covenant not to sue Suzanne Atkinson, M.D., and **Steel City Endurance, Ltd.**, its instructors, members, directors, agents, officers, volunteers and employees, any sponsors, advertisers and, if applicable, any owners and lessors of premises on which any portion of the Program takes place (each considered a "Releasee" herein), from all liability, claims, demands, losses or damages on my account caused or alleged to be caused in whole or in part by the negligence of the Releasee or otherwise; and I further agree that if, despite this release and waiver of liability, assumption of the risk, and indemnity agreement, I, or anyone on my behalf, makes a claim against any Releasee, I WILL INDEMNIFY, SAVE AND HOLD HARMLESS such Releasee from any litigation expenses, attorney fees, loss, liability, damage or costs which any may incur as a result of such claim, to the fullest extent permitted by law.

C. UNDERSTAND that **Steel City Endurance, Ltd.** and Suzanne Atkinson, M.D. do not offer medical advice, establish a doctor-patient relationship or keep any permanent medical records about me. All medical questions that I may have while participating in the Program must be directed toward my personal physician.

I HAVE READ THIS AGREEMENT, FULLY UNDERSTAND ITS TERMS, UNDERSTAND THAT I HAVE GIVEN UP SUBSTANTIAL RIGHTS BY SIGNING IT AND HAVE SIGNED IT FREELY AND WITHOUT ANY INDUCEMENT OR ASSURANCE OF ANY NATURE AND INTEND IT TO BE A COMPLETE AND UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF ALL LIABILITY TO THE GREATEST EXTENT ALLOWED BY LAW AND AGREE THAT IF ANY PORTION OF THIS AGREEMENT IS HELD TO BE INVALID, THE BALANCE, NOTWITHSTANDING, SHALL CONTINUE IN FULL FORCE AND EFFECT.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed Name of Participant**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parental Consent (if participant is under the age of 18) - Continued below**

**ATHLETE WAIVER AND RELEASE FROM LIABILITY (Cont)****Parental Consent (if participant is under the age of 18)**

AND I, the minor's parent and/or legal guardian, understand the nature of the above-referenced Program and the minor's experience and capabilities, and I believe the minor to be qualified to participate in such Program. I hereby release, discharge, covenant not to sue, and AGREE TO INDEMNIFY AND SAVE AND HOLD HARMLESS each Releasee from all liability, claims, demands, losses, or damages on the minor's account caused or alleged to be caused in whole or part by the negligence of any Releasee or otherwise, and further agree that if, despite this release, I, the minor, or anyone on the minor's behalf makes a claim against any Releasee, I WILL INDEMNIFY, SAVE, AND HOLD HARMLESS each of Releasee from any litigation expenses, attorney fees, loss liability, damage, or cost any may incur as the result of any such claim, to the fullest extent permitted by law.

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**Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian**

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**Printed Name of Guardian****Date:** \_\_\_\_\_