

TALKING TRIATHLON WITH STEVE JONAS

GETTING EQUIPPED FOR NEXT SEASON: STARTING OUT

Reading this, you may be starting out in multisport racing or if not, you may want to pass these general considerations on to a family member or friend who is just taking up the sport. Of course, if you are coming to multisport from racing in one of its three disciplines — the swim, bike or run — you likely already have a set of equipment for that sport with which you are comfortable. But let's run through the basics for all three in any case.

Most folks coming to multisport racing will have some background in running and will have at least one pair of running shoes. To get started, that's all you need. Race-specific shoes (and I do use them myself) can come later. The first three considerations for shoes are:

- The design — motion control, stability or neutral, should be right for your foot. The best place to go for advice on this is a running shoe store with knowledgeable staff.
- They should fit well when laced up, meaning that they should touch your foot everywhere except over the toes.
- They should be relatively new. It can be very comfortable running in shoes that feel like bedroom slippers, but even slight imbalances in running shoes can increase your risk of experiencing anything from shin splints to knee and hip problems.

As for the bike, I suggest that when starting out you can use any bike that you figure will get you around the courses of your first few races. It can be your old 10-speed or a borrowed one that fits you. It can be a road bike, mountain bike, cyclocross bike or even a city bike if the course has no serious hills.

In the beginning, you want to be able to experience multisport racing

without having to spend a lot of money up front. If planning to buy a new bike, I strongly recommend against starting out with a tri bike, the one with the forward-facing "aero-bars" that enable you to get low over the handlebars to become more aerodynamic. Riding in that position takes skill and practice. To ride safely while training in high-traffic areas takes practice. Furthermore, not everyone (including yours truly) finds riding aero comfortable. Needless to say, I have ridden a road bike in every one of the 215-plus races I have done. If you get fast, you can always get one down the road.

A good aluminum road bike can be found for \$500 and up, while the carbon fiber bikes generally start at about \$1,500. The most important characteristics of a new bike are the quality of its components (shifters, derailleurs, wheels, tires and so forth) and its fit. I always recommend shopping for bikes at a bike pro shop where you can get good advice on such matters.

You will need a bike helmet for safety on your training rides and to meet the rules requirements in the races. You don't have to spend a lot of money on your first. They all have to meet minimum safety standards. Just make sure it fits and is comfy. You will want at least one water bottle mount and may want a bike computer to measure speed, distance, time and cadence (revolutions per minute). If you are into comfort like me, you will want a pair of bike gloves. You can use running shoes on the bike when you're first starting, with or without toe clips. There will be plenty of time to get into bike shoes and pedals later.

For the swim, the big question is "wetsuit or no wetsuit?" Wetsuits



provide both warmth and buoyancy. Regardless of the fact that what's cold to one swimmer is comfy to another, just for the latter characteristic you will definitely want to have one. An increasing number of bike shops and of course triathlon shops offer wetsuits. As prices for the top-end suits have risen, for the entry-level suits they have fallen, down to \$100 for a sleeveless full-length suit. At the same time, at an increasing number of tri, bike and dive shops, you can rent a triathlon-specific wetsuit. Of course you will also want a pair of fitted goggles.

Finally, there is the matter of clothing. You can start out simply with a close-fitting bike jersey and lighter-weight bike shorts that you will wear for the whole race from the swim through the run, yes, under the wetsuit if you wear one. No one changes outfits during the race anymore. If you choose to wear socks (and I still do) use your bike socks in your running shoes. You will need a bag or a backpack in which to carry all your stuff to transition.

And that's about it. Just remember, at the beginning, it's not about the equipment. It's about being safe and having fun. Once you're into the sport, there will be plenty of opportunities to purchase triathlon-specific gear. ■

Dr. Steve Jonas has been a multisport athlete for 28 years, is the author of "Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals®," currently in its 24th year of publication (2nd ed. new in 2006), and is a professor of preventive medicine at Stony Brook University (N.Y.). His website is www.ordinarymortals.net.