

## TRY-A-TRI TIPS part 1 – training for a SwimBikeRun-MINI / TRY-A-TRI Triathlon



This guide is aimed at first-time triathletes, to give you an overview of how you can train for a multisport event if you haven't done it before.

The SwimBikeRun initiative was launched with the intention of making it easier for people to “get into” triathlon, so the distances are always beginner-friendly and the races are low-cost (no more than 20 pounds) and small & informal.

All you need to do to complete a SwimBikeRun Mini Triathlon such as our “Try-a-Tri” at Tockington, is to be able to swim a bit, cycle a bit, jog a bit and get your head round the transitions that come in between.

If it sounds easy, that's because it is, but don't tell anyone because despite its growing popularity, there is still a cool-factor attached to completing a triathlon and we don't want people thinking it is anything other than the ultimate physical challenge 😊

I am going to deal with issues like getting the necessary kit (appropriate bike, helmet, etc.) in another guide and also dedicate one to the art of “transition” between sports, but for now I am going to focus solely on training & conditioning so you know what I required to get fit enough to complete the event.

The [Sri Chinmoy](#) Try-a-Tri is a proper Triathlon, but the course adheres to the SwimBikeRun-Mini event guidelines when it come to distance. The lengths of each section are shorter than Super Sprint or Sprint Triathlon, but they do meet the minimum requirements of the British Triathlon Federation. The distances of our event are:

**SWIM – 200 metres** - 8 lengths of the 25m pool in Tockington Manor School – pretty much the standard pool size you see at most leisure centres.

**BIKE – 10km** on lanes and minor roads with a few small ups and downs but no “climbs”. This should take most people between 20 and 40 minutes – quite a few will get round in half an hour or less. The total ascent on the course is 50 metres which is really not a lot. You have to ride solo, not in a bunch, as that is one of the rules of amateur triathlon – “no drafting” behind other riders to save energy. If you have watched elite-level triathlon e.g. the Olympics, you'll know they have different rules to make for a more TV-friendly race with a closer finish, so they are allowed to ride in a bunch.

**RUN – 3km** around the school playing field. Not 100% flat, but pretty close. That is less than 2 miles in old money and although it's on grass, you can do it in normal trainers rather than specially designed cross-country or trail shoes.

So, let's take each sport and have a look at what you should be aiming for in your training through the Spring to be ready for a summer Try-a-Tri.

## 1 – The Swim



That's a shot of the pool at Tockington. Most people make their first triathlon a pool-based one. I did that – my first tri was the Dorset Try-a-Tri and I loved it. I was soon out racing in open water (lake/sea) but for your first race it makes sense to get the swim leg done in a more predictable environment – you know it's going to be a comfortable temperature and with no waves or currents to contend with. The only complication is that you will be sharing a lane with 2 or 3 other swimmers. The good news is that 4 in a lane is less than most people have to deal with in their swim training at their local pool. Also, you'll be put in a lane with swimmers of similar speed and started at 10-second intervals instead of all at the same time, so you won't need to overtake or be overtaken very much.

Most people come to triathlon from a running or cycling background and it is common for people to be nervous/anxious about the swim. A lot of triathlon-first-timers find themselves learning to swim pretty much from scratch. Learning something new can be daunting, and the older you are the more daunting it can seem, but the payoff of this is that the personal sense of achievement is greater once you find yourself smoothly swimming your 8 lengths.

If you are brand new to swimming, Adult Learner sessions at your local pool are probably the best way to start. It is best to learn freestyle/front-crawl but you can certainly complete your first triathlon doing breast-stroke if you want to. Backstroke is not permitted in pool triathlons, as you won't be able to see the other swimmers and turn/overtake safely, but any frontal stroke is fine.

If you learnt to swim as a kid but have forgotten a lot of what you used to know, Adult Improver sessions might be a good first step. Most Leisure Centres will offer these and a few sessions as a learner or improver should give you the grounding you need to complete 8 lengths of your chosen stroke.

I was not able to swim freestyle when I first started training for a triathlon, but I was able to swim a few lengths of breast-stroke. So, I signed up for Adult Improvers and went to the sessions. The instructors taught me how to breathe to the side and swim with my face in the water – we did drills including holding a float out in front with one hand while kicking the legs and just rotating the free arm through the water, turning the head to breathe in and turning back to blow bubbles into the water while breathing out.

They also had me practising at home between those weekly sessions, not swimming but just breathing into a bath full of water – kneeling at the side of the bath and practising the motion of turning the head to breathe in from the side then turning back face-down to breathe out. This bizarre-looking practice actually worked (!) and within weeks I could front-crawl a couple of lengths for the first time without swallowing loads of water and having to stop. Once you can do a couple of lengths, you aim to do 3 without stopping and then 4 and so on until 8 is something you can do without much hassle.

If you are already a confident swimmer who can lane-swim for half an hour several times a week, then you didn't need to read any of this – you are already Try-a-Tri-ready and just need to work on those other sports while not neglecting your swimming too much.

Whatever your swimming ability, once you have got the hang of swimming 200m in the pool, you need to do it with other swimmers around you. If you train at a quiet time of day when hardly anyone is in the pool and you have a lane to yourself, sharing a lane on race day won't be easy. Get yourself to the pool at a busy time and do some lane-swimming with others in your lane, getting used to allowing others to pass you at the end of a length then kick off from the poolside and follow them back the other way.

Tumble-turns are not required in triathlon. They make your swim quicker, but if you have never learnt the art, don't worry. Just touch the end of the pool and push-off or kick-off from the poolside after each length.

**Try-a-Tri Training Goal: to be able to swim 200m confidently in a time of 15 minutes or less, in a 25m pool in a shared lane. You also need to enter/exit from the poolside (without using steps) as this is a requirement on race day.**

**Suggested Training: 2 sessions of swimming a week initially, one where you get some instruction (learner or improver session, depending on your level of ability when you start) and one where you just do lane swimming. Once you are confident over 200m only one weekly swim will be required to keep you swim-fit.**

**If you don't have time in your life to get to a pool twice a week then don't be put off – that is a suggestion but by no means a requirement. If you can only swim 2-4 times a month you should still be able to get up to Try-a-Tri standard, just make the best use of each session and remember what you are aiming for. If you are already a confident swimmer you might want to include "drills" in your training to improve technique, speed and efficiency but these would be the icing on the cake, rather than essentials. Just do an internet search for "swim drills for triathletes" to find some information on those.**

## 2 – The Bike Ride



10k on a bike is not that far – it’s about half an hour at the pace google maps uses to predict cycle times and google is not expecting every user to be an athlete or keen cyclist. The route is on public roads, so you need to be confident dealing with traffic, though you could well get round without seeing more than 1 or 2 cars as the roads we use are pretty quiet.

You need a reasonable bike – safe, roadworthy and not so heavy or cumbersome that it makes the ride really hard work. A proper road bike (aka a racing bike) is not required though – for the Try-a-Tri you can go ahead and buy all the gear for a long career in triathlon or you can just make do with what you already have and see how you like the sport, before you invest major amounts of cash in it. If you do the race on a mountain bike you might want to spend out on some smooth tyres as they offer less resistance than the knobbly type. Hybrid bikes and touring bikes will get you round fine. E-bikes can be used but only if the battery is removed – triathlon is a self-powered sport.

If you currently cycle on an indoor trainer or at spin classes, you will need to get out on the road at some stage. You may develop the right fitness and muscle-strength indoors, but you need road-sense too and the ability to handle a bike safely on the bends and in traffic. So, a mix of indoor and outdoor training is fine, but not exclusively indoor.

Your Try-a-Tri training should be based around endurance so that you can complete the course and still have the energy you need for the run. A secondary goal is to build up your speed (it is a race, after all, and you want to do your best in it) and you may even want to practise running after cycling. We call this *running-off-the-bike*, but I’ll deal with that in the next section which is about the run.

**Try-a-Tri Training Goal – to be able to ride 10k on an undulating course and still have the energy to run afterwards.**

**Suggested Training – at least one bike ride per week, building up your distance gradually until you can ride 20km on a flattish course without being exhausted. The bike ride in the event is only 10km, but you can use your training rides to build fitness so that you have enough stamina to swim, ride and run the whole event. Cycling is low-impact so you can use those over-distance rides to work on your endurance without much risk of overdoing it or picking up a sports injury.**

If you have time for a second ride in the week, you could make it a faster session where you ride a little harder for some or all of the time – not sprinting by any stretch of the imagination, just pedalling a little harder than on your weekly “long” ride. This optional second session could be half the length of your long ride.

Ideally, at some stage in your training you should get yourself over to Tockington and ride our course, which is 2 laps of a nice 5km loop:

<https://www.mapmyride.com/routes/view/4783443790>

### 3. The Run



The run is the simplest part of a triathlon, and in the Try-a-Tri, it is only about 3km (approx. 2 miles). If you haven't done much running, or any running at all for that matter, remember the saying "don't try to run before you can walk". Most people start their running training that way - with brisk walking. Once you can walk briskly for half an hour, insert some short jogs into the middle section of your walking session, for example some 2-minute jogs interspersed with walking to get your breath back. Gradually increase the number of jogs and decrease the gaps between them - this will happen naturally as your fitness improves and your muscles get used to the activity.

I won't put a training program here, as there are plenty available online (just google "couch to 5k run program" or similar and you will find a few options). The Try-a-Tri course at Tockington is pretty flat as you can see from the photo, so hill training for the run is not required. If you are already a runner, the only thing unique to triathlon that you may want to practise is running straight after cycling. In the world of triathlon this is called *running off the bike*. To get the hang of running off the bike, you just need to cycle until you can feel some fatigue in your leg muscles, then get off the bike and run straight away. The muscles you use on the bike will be warmed up and have the blood flowing through them nicely, while your different muscle groups used for running will be in the opposite state. The first part of the run can feel stiff and awkward. Practice helps your body get used to the change in activities, and it starts to feel easier. Training sessions of this kind that involve two or more sports are called "Brick Sessions" and are favoured by experienced triathletes. For a beginner they aren't strictly needed – again they would just be the icing on the cake.

As with cycling, you can get your training started indoors if you have a treadmill – Runners World have put together this beginner's guide to indoor running which has some useful tips: <https://www.runnersworld.com/beginner/a20847537/running-and-walking-on-the-treadmill/>

**Training Aims:** Get used to walking/jogging/running the full race distance of 3km. If you want race practice, we have a 2-mile running event in Bristol every May - details are on our web site below - you don't need to enter in advance, you can just come along and enter the race on the night: <http://uk.srichinmoyraces.org/races/bristol>

**If you have time and feel your running is going well, practise running off the bike. A good way to get experience of that would be to enter our beginner's duathlon event at Tockington – see website <http://uk.srichinmoyraces.org/multisport-events> or simply arrange a training session so that you can start to jog/run within a couple of minutes of finishing a bike ride – depending on what kit you wear this might involve a quick kit-change in your garage or just inside the front door, before heading out on the run. Those of you with a Tri Suit will have a quicker transition from one sport to the other.**

So, to get round a SwimBikeRun / Try-a-Tri event, you should be aiming ideally to train 3 times a week (one session at each sport) and if you have time, you would want to double-up on your weakest sport, practising that twice in the week if you can. With each sport, your sessions should start with what you can manage right now and build up to the race distance – except with cycling where it's a good idea to build up to a ride that lasts as long as your entire Triathlon is going to (so you get used to exertion of that duration).

As you get nearer to the event date, you'll want to have Brick Sessions (2 or 3 sports combined into a single session) and practice the transition from one sport to another, essentially just a kit change, but you don't want to mess that up on race day so it's good to have at least one practice.

If that sounds like too much, take a look at the SwimBikeRun website - <https://www.britishtriathlon.org/swimbikerun> - as there are more resources and tips appearing there that could be useful and details of sessions you can join to get you started.

OK so there's a few tips for you on training for your first SwimBikeRun or Try-a-Tri event. Feel free to get back to me if you have any questions, or get in contact with your local triathlon club who are doubtless keen to welcome new members with or without any triathlon experience.

Good luck getting yourself race-fit and remember the most important thing about training is to ENJOY IT!!

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