

TRY-A-TRI TIPS part 4 – Them’s the rules!

Simplifying the complex and ever-changing rules of triathlon 😊

Hi everyone, this is the 4th of our “Tips” articles that we are sending round in advance of the Try-a-Tri race at Tockington in August.

The rules of triathlon are constantly changing and evolving, meaning that some things that were allowed a few years ago are now banned (like having your run/bike kit stashed in a large crate or box in Transition) and other things that used to be banned are now perfectly fine (like having disc brakes on your bike).

First things first – please can everyone take a look at the current Competition Rules for Triathlon in the UK? These rules will all be applied in the Try-a-Tri even though it is a beginner-friendly SwimBikeRun-Mini event, but the difference is that we will be very relaxed at how we enforce them. This means you might be politely asked to correct something you are doing rather than be disqualified for doing it. **Please pay attention to the rules about “uniform”** and having no part of your torso showing once you have left the first Transition – there are even rules about how much you can unzip your top, so please check all this by reading the rules in advance.

<https://www.britishtriathlon.org/competitionrules>

So, let’s go through those rules and give you a very brief summary of how they affect you before and during the event. **I do need everyone to read through the whole rules document** online at some stage before race day, but for now I’m going to give you the edited highlights in this article and concentrate on what might come as a surprise to first-timers, or those returning to Triathlon after doing it a few years ago when the rules were different.

Let’s start with equipment.

Bikes – what is allowed and what is not allowed in a UK Triathlon?



Believe it or not this photo is from one of our early club events and I’ve included it just to remind everyone you don’t need a flash aerodynamic bike to do a triathlon.

What you do need is a roadworthy bike of standard design with 2 working brakes. And a helmet that is in good condition and meets the usual safety standards.

The rules state that you cannot use a non-traditional or unusual bike without prior permission, so tell me well in advance (40 days)

of the race if you have any questions about the eligibility of your machine!

Some key rules that do affect a few people are **There must be a brake on both wheels and both wheels must be freewheels**. That means no Fixed Gear (“fixie”) bikes can be used. If unsure whether this affects you, please get in touch at least 40 days before the event so we can clarify things. British Triathlon have confirmed to me that **if anyone wants to use an E-Bike (electrically powered) in the Try-a-Tri they can do so if they remove the battery**. If your only bike is an E-bike that means you can take part without having to buy a new bike, but you have to be self-powered!

Helmetts

To check that your Helmet is of an approved type, look inside it for labels/tags and ensure it has one of the following: ANSI Z90.4, SNELL B90, EN 1078. If it doesn't, new helmets that DO meet the requirements are inexpensive and readily available at your LBS (Local Bike Shop).

The main problem with helmet eligibility is that some new helmets which are available cheap online do not meet the safety standards – so be cautious when buying those. I'm talking mainly about Temu, Ali Express etc. Some great-looking helmets going cheap there, but if they aren't certified you can't wear them in the Try-a-Tri, **and you do need a helmet** to take part.

Now we've addressed the key area of bike eligibility lets go through the race sport by sport and tell you the key things to be aware of.

Swim rules



Common sense applies to the swim really, plus a bit of health and safety. Rules include **No jumping or diving to get in** and **backstroke is not permitted in pool swims**. You get a penalty (time added on to your finishing time) if you **False Start**, so wait for us to say GO! before you actually go. A lot of first-timers get nervous/edgy and start before they should, so remember to hold back and stay calm at the start. A good tip is not to have your head underwater while you are under starter's orders waiting to hear that GO! – surprisingly a lot of people forget this on the day of the race....

Some people will inevitably get tired during the swim and want a breather – it is fine to hold on to the end of the pool (or stand at the shallow end) for a brief rest to get your breath back and then carry on. If you need to do this just stay right at the side of your lane so as not to get in the way of other swimmers doing their turns.

That reminds me - one key rule in the swim is that you must not get in the way of others – there should be **no “impeding”**. If two swimmers make contact but immediately move apart that is not a problem. If one is blocking/impeding another and carries on doing it, that can result in a time penalty. If the blocking/impeding is deliberate then that is cheating and results in disqualification as you’d expect.

Being slow in the swim does NOT constitute impedance. It would only be a problem if you drifted into the wrong half of your lane and blocked someone swimming back the other way. If you do find the swimmer behind you has caught up and is right behind you wanting to overtake, the polite (and smart) thing to do is wait for a second or two at the end of the length, so that they can turn first and go in front of you. Allowing the faster swimmer to pass is good race conduct, as it benefits both swimmers – the faster one gets clear water and can go at their natural pace, while the slower one can follow them and this may result in them going faster or using less energy. Although “drafting” behind another athlete is not allowed in the bike section of a triathlon, it is totally fine in the swim. I had no idea how much difference this can make until I started doing regular lane-swimming in my local pool and found that being in the front of a queue of swimmers was definitely more tiring than swimming the same pace behind someone.

Swim equipment

Officially you should wear a Tri Suit or Costume and if you go for a costume (which could be just shorts/trunks for male competitors) you then have to pull on more kit after the swim. The rules state that there should be **no coverage of the forearms or calves during a pool swim** so bear that in mind when choosing your kit. For example, those wanting to have compression sleeves on their calves for the bike or run need to put those on *after* the swim. In the Try-a-Tri **you will be issued with a swim cap and wearing this is mandatory**, as we identify the different swimmers in each lane by the colour of their cap. **You are not permitted to wear your race number while swimming**, so those have to be put on after the swim in the Transition phase, known as T1. They can be pinned to your additional clothes that you intend to wear for the bike/run, or you can use a Triathlon Number belt.

When you have done the full distance of 8 lengths (200m) in the swim you **need to get out of the pool without using the steps** –the swimmers in the middle lanes would be disadvantaged if use of the steps was allowed. So, practice pulling yourself out of the pool at the end of your session when you do your swim training. Tip – this is easier backwards than forwards – try it! If this presents problems for you, please contact me well before the race so I can see what we can do to help – there are a few adjustments a race director can make if anyone has limited flexibility and finds it hard to exit the pool.

Transition rules



Straight after the swim you have your first taste of “transition”, as you change from being in swim mode to getting on your bike and heading out on the road. **Like many races ours has a split transition, as it is a couple of hundred metres from pool to bike rack** and the ground is a mix of gravel, grass and tarmac. It would be hard going in bare feet, so we allow you to bring your shoes to the pool and slip them on as soon as you exit the swim, so you have them on your feet for the jog to Transition. Some of the rules that affect you in transition include:

All competitors must have their helmet securely fastened from the time they remove their bike from the rack before the start of the bike leg, until after they have placed their bike on the rack after the finish of the bike leg and Cycling is not permitted inside the Transition Area. Mount and dismount lines are part of the transition area. I would say those are the key things to remember – you have to get your helmet on and clipped up before taking your bike off the rack, then push the bike up to the Mount Line (& just past it) before you get on it. **It's all clearly signed** at the Try-a-Tri and marshals will be reminding you if you forget any of these rules. You have to stash your used kit in transition, in a tidy manner so it doesn't impede others (you have a space about half a metre wide for your bike and kit) and you are **not allowed to have large bags or boxes** for your kit any more. Transition boxes used to be a common site in triathlon, but they were getting in the way, so now you have to have no more than a small e.g. 20 litre bag for bits and pieces. I'll do a detailed article on transition in a future Tips article, so that the first-timers among you know exactly how to lay it out and avoid any rules-issues.

A few other rules to note are **Helpers, friends, or family members are not permitted in transition areas; Mobile telephones can be brought into transition but may not be used whilst the transition area is live; Pets must not be brought into transition at any time by any person; Competitors must not wear or use headphone(s), headset(s), technical earplug(s) in the Transition Area.**

I was surprised to see the no pets rule – do people take their dog to a triathlon and try to stash it in transition, with the lead attached to the bike rack? Surely not. Anyway, it's there in the rules, so dog owners in particular please note – 😊.

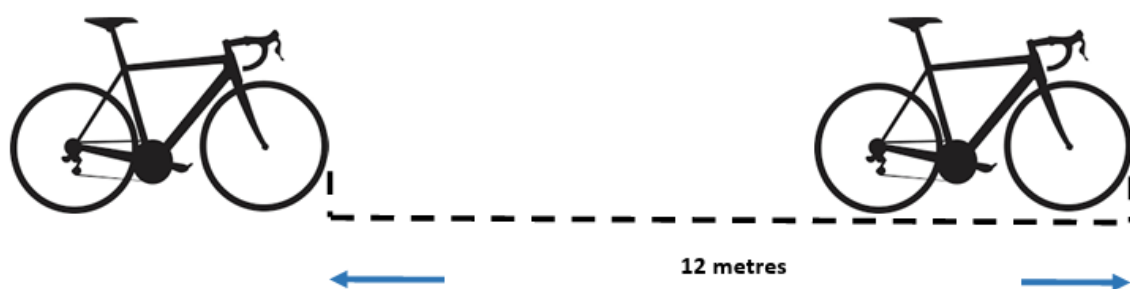
Cycling rules

The main things to be aware of once you are out on the bike are that **you have to obey the highway code and you cannot ride in a bunch**. Although the route will be signed and marshalled, each rider is responsible for knowing the way and finding their way round, so it is good to look at a course map in advance and know the way. With our simple 5km bike loop that is very straightforward. You can see the route at: <https://www.mapmyride.com/routes/view/4783443790>.

The Try-a-Tri course is 2 laps of a 5k Loop, so you have to be aware of this and **make sure you GO ROUND TWICE**. Every year we have at least one person who only does one lap, and as a result is deemed not to have completed the Triathlon. From talking to other race organisers, I have discovered this is not uncommon, but don't let it happen to you (all that training for no result / no medal would be a disappointment). You can use a watch that measures distance to be certain, or just be aware that you come to the marshalled junction by Tockington Green after 5k (where there is **a sign saying LEFT for LAP2 and RIGHT for FINISH**) and you must turn left. Then you will find that you come to the same marshalled junction by Tockington Green again after 9.6k and this time you turn right and head for the school, to do the run segment of the race and cross the finish line.

Marshals at the junction by Tockington Green will be ticking off laps to make sure that everyone has done 2, but as your number is on your back they won't be able to tell you *as you approach* whether you should go left or right. **You have to be aware of whether you have done one loop or 2**. If in doubt, you can stop (safely) and ask the marshals to check their list and see if they have ticked you off for lap 1 already, but be aware they may have to wait until there's a pause in the action before they take their eyes off the other competitors to look this up for you. They are dealing with 100 riders on the day!

The most confusing rule for new triathletes is probably the No Drafting rule, and as elite triathlons don't have this restriction it can come as a surprise to anyone who got inspired to try a triathlon after seeing Alex Yee or Beth Potter on TV at the Olympics.



That standard draft-rule diagram shows that you need to leave 12m between your front wheel and the front wheel of the rider up ahead of you unless you are in the process of overtaking. **You are not permitted to ride close behind, or alongside, another rider.**

The drafting rule states: **The bicycle draft zone will be 12 metres long measured from the leading edge of the front wheel. A competitor may enter the draft zone, but must be seen to be progressing through that zone. A maximum of 25 seconds will be allowed to pass through the zone of another competitor. Consecutive attempts to overtake with no success may lead to a drafting infringement;**

So, you have 25 seconds in which to pass someone and if you don't manage to (e.g. because they speed up to hold you off), you have to drop back to restore that 12m separation. If you do pass someone, they are expected to drop back so that the 12m gap between you and them reappears.

Here are two must-read pages you should read or print out so you can get familiar with them – if you have any questions give me a shout.

<https://www.britishtriathlon.org/britain/documents/get-involved/volunteers-and-officials/british-triathlon---know-the-rules-poster-2025.pdf>

<https://www.britishtriathlon.org/britain/documents/get-involved/volunteers-and-officials/officials/british-triathlon---drafting-rules-poster-2025.pdf>

Apart from highway-code and drafting, another key rule on the bike is **No Littering**. Do make sure that if you do take any snacks etc. with you that you are capable of managing the wrappers safely and without dropping any rubbish on the road. You also have to make sure you have a race number visible to the rear when cycling – so this means you can either wear a number pinned to your front and another one on your back (we give you 2 large numbers on race day) or you can use one number on a number belt and just swivel it from back to front when you switch from bike to run.

Running Rules



The running segment is pretty simple – however do be aware that there are rules that state you cannot use phones, headphones & earpieces and also you have to be careful of that littering rule mentioned above in the cycling section. We will have a water station where you can stash a bottle of water or sports drink with your name on it for use on each lap, we will also supply bottled water so you can hang on to a bottle until the finish OR discard it just by the water station where we will have a bin of some kind. You have to keep your top on for the run – no running “bare chested” or even with exposed midriff (honestly – see section [2.8 of the rules, entitled Uniform](#)).

Some of the Uniform rules are surprising for newcomers (and to me, if I'm totally honest) so here are some examples – but please read the whole section.

Competitors must wear the uniform during the entire competition

The uniform must cover the whole torso in the front. The back may be uncovered from the waist up;

Where a two-piece uniform is used, both pieces must overlap, and no torso must be visible during the entire race with the exception of the swim section

Front zippers (across all distances) are allowed.....The uniform should be fully zipped in the last 100 metres before the finish line

Race numbers must be affixed to the competitor's clothing or to a suitable race belt or bib. The number must be clearly visible at all times, and it is the competitor's responsibility to ensure this to avoid any penalties.

During the cycling phase, a number must be displayed to the rear;

During the running phase, a number must be displayed to the front;

Hope everyone has read the above, as I don't want to spend race day nagging people to put their tops on, do their zips up, cover their bare section of torso, etc. etc. And you won't want to be nagged in this way on race day either.

One of the most common problems the race marshals have is that people do the run with their number on their back, their side, or flapping in the breeze while pinned with a single safety pin to some item of clothing. If we can't see your number, we won't be able to record your laps or finish! So, if you use a race belt, please make sure the number is clearly visible on your front while you do the run, especially when you pass the lap counters and cross the finish line. If you pin your number on, use pins in all 4 corners not just 2 or 3.

OK I think that's enough for one article – get back to me if you have any questions about any of the rules. I may not know all the answers, but I have contacts at British Triathlon / SwimBikeRun who definitely do 😊.

A long read of rules is pretty boring, so to get this in context, if you are familiar with them you don't have to think about them on race-day and can just enjoy the Tri.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR TRAINING!!

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