

Thoughts on Equipment for swims

Freda Streeter

This year we started the season with a brilliant swim from Cliff, he didn't have ideal conditions, but he stayed there and finished the swim in 14hours 37 minutes. Well done Cliff we are all proud of you.

Having said all that, we must now come down to the nitty gritty of the swim, Cliff has had many lists from me same as other swimmers over the year, some things admittedly, were not on the list as we have added to it over the years, but you **MUST** check things as you pack them in you bag, and you must be very methodical about it, plus you must explain to your feeder/helper, and the **crew** where everything is, it is important, to explain to the crew, as often your helpers will be on a first ever Channel experience, get very sea sick, or just being out to sea, if they are not used to it, can get very, very tired, and find at times they can play no part in the swim.

Cups

We have experimented hundreds of times with the size of cups, some people say it should only be very large cups, while other find them firstly, too big for their hands, particularly when they are cold, others find they cannot tip their heads back far enough to drain them, hopefully we will get a chance to practice feeding, and swimming beside a boat this year, but even that does not give a true reading of how you will cope when you are tired and the occasion overcomes you, out in the big wide ditch.

If it is choppy and it so often is, some people will need a feeding bottle, but this often takes too long, either to suck it out, or to take the top off and tip your head back far enough to drain the contents. It is a good idea to put on the boat, a varying size of cups, (preferably with simple lids) two feeding bottles, and leave the crew to work out which is best. **NEVER** take anyone else's, preferences as your own, because it may be completely different, you have worked very hard for this swim, you have also paid a lot of money, do not let things go wrong, just to save a few pennies now, I have seen it all before.

If you are given a feed, and a wave swamps the cup, do not drink it, but swim on until another feed can be made for you, drinking a mixture of salt water, and maxim, is never a good idea if you want the swim to be successful.

Goggles

Always take spare goggles with you, and varying types, i.e., you might start to swim in bright sunlight, in which case you will need some really dark goggles, if it is overcast, it can still be bright, but maybe you will need some lighter tinted goggles, but it is very important you remember to pack some clear goggles, when daylight turns to night, you need to change them, so you can at least see something!!!

Mouthwash

Use a mouthwash out there to take the salt taste away from your mouth, if only for a few minutes, but please remember, what you use on dry land, is too strong for the tender mouth. you will have out there, if you don't want very painful ulcers afterwards, dilute it 50/50 and you will find it will do the trick.

Nibbles

Make anything you want to eat out there, **simple**, wasting time trading water and chewing, can mean the difference to your swim, five minute stops on a 10 hour swim, means another 50 minutes of swimming, maybe much, much more if you miss the tide over the other side, I know you need to chat, and the crew at time need to know how you are feeling, and very importantly check your responses, if you take things to eat, like Mars Bars, or Twix, the toffee in them will stick to the roof of your very cold mouth, and take a long time to dissolve, over the years our experience tells us Cadburys mini rolls, milky ways go down the best, if you are not a chocolate eater, take some soft fruit jellies. If you think you will get sick of sweet stuff, takes something savoury, but nothing with meat in, nothing springs to mind as being suitable at the moment of writing this, but someone will come up with a bright idea. One thing is handy to put on the boat are some cup of soups, they can be made quickly for you once the swim is over, and you will then know there is something savoury to look forward to once you climb back aboard. All you American swimmers, please note, Tim Lawrence could not swim without his Twinkies.!! We do not sell them in the UK

Medicine

Paracetamol are very good for a headache, or minor pain. Ibuprofen are very good for the painful groin/shoulder etc, it will help relieve inflammation etc., these tablets are always much easier if they are given to a swimmer in a small cup, they seldom feed the fish this way, the swimmer is able to throw the tablet to the back of his throat, and have a quick drink to wash it down.

Bottled Water

You really need a lot of bottled water on board, the boats have plenty of tap water on the boat, you must remember, that this water has been stored in tanks, and although it does not affect many people, remember you are an athlete, a very finely tuned machine, you never want to run the risk of any bugs out there, (don't let the pilots see this bit, as they get fiercely upset and take offence if you say anything about there boats).

Always please remember your feeders and helpers, it is not easy for them to lift and pour, from those very large bottles, especially at sea, a two litre bottle, is the largest to manage easily.

Anti Histamine

These tablets are very useful, in case of jelly fish stings, Claratyn are very good as they do not make you drowsy, very few people need the out in the English Channel, but it is far better to have them and to be safe rather than sorry.

Clothing

By all means turn up for your swim, in your nice sweatshirts, designer gear or whatever, but please make sure for after the swim, you have on board some old clothing, there is nothing worse, than seeing a swimmer, who still has grease all over them and plenty of dirt that has stuck to that grease, trying to put on this nice gear,

make sure you have something old, loose and easy to put on, so you can get warm quickly. Make sure this gear is in a separate bag, and your trainer/helper knows where it is. Please make sure the warm hat is with this.

Trainers/Helpers

Make sure you have put food aboard for your supporters, trainers and helpers, they may not eat much out there, but it would be terrible if you left them hungry, again nibbles sweet and savoury, and plenty of fruit, and perhaps the odd sandwich, is usually enough.

String

String is useful, if you decide you need your feeding bottle, you can attach it to a long length of string, and your helper will be able to pull it back on the boat, also if all the light sticks work, (and some do fail), the spare ones at night can be hung from the boat, so you can see them clearly.

Swimmer differ in the way they want the boat lit, if the pilots run with all their light on, many swimmers find the bright light, and the reflection off their goggles make them feel very sick, usually the light sticks are enough, and the pilot can run with the minimum amount of lighting on the boat, which you would find far more comfortable.

Maxim

I always make up the maxim before I go out with a swimmer, I usually have around 4 litres made up and almost ready to serve, if you do this, please remember, to put Maxim powder on the boat plus the flavouring, in case of accidents, or you may need more.

Maxim made up as stated on the packaging, is for normal sports people, please remember, you are not normal, I find most people need it double strength, you need energy to swim and you also need it to keep warm.

You must try the dosage before the swim, on Tim Lawrence's swim at time he was having six times the amount, remembering he is one large guy, with a massive appetite, although he did not drink it that strength, throughout the swim, only when he needed a boost.

I found it very hard to mix it that strength, the only way I had success was dissolving it in hot water over the stove. Little Lee Williams for example, needs maxim at normal strength, other wise she feels very sick. Flavouring is very important, Maxim will not mix with pure fruit juice, but squashes come in many different flavours these days, see which one you like the best, or pick out two or three so you can have a change.

Always, when you are mixing Maxim, put the water in first, add the Maxim and leave it to stand for a few seconds, before trying to mix it, this way does not give you any lumps.

Maxim is by far the best product I have tried on swimmers so far, most other products have their little problems which are detrimental to the swimmer. Please do not dismiss it, some people try it once and say "I can't get on with it" you have to experiment with it, also I have know several swimmers who would not even try it, only to find

when their swim was going wrong out there, they have been fed Maxim, (unbeknown to them) and they have gone on to complete the swim.

Grease

People still run around looking for Channel Grease, firmly convinced they must have some, and the old pictures of people smothered in it always seem to spring to mind. It does not keep you warm, acclimatisation, swimming hard, feeding correctly will keep hypothermia away, I believe, (and this is only my thoughts) that a lot of grease is far more of a hindrance, grease in large quantities, firstly smells, and if you are covered in it, that is a long time to live with that smell, also if you have a large quantity of it, it rolls up and makes ridges, most people shave down for sprint swimming, and here is a person, swimming a very long distance, and they are making it harder to drag themselves through the water, I have also known swimmers to use as much as three pounds of grease, that is a lot of extra weight you do not need. I do not believe the body can “breathe” properly, if all your pores are clogged up with this foul smelling stuff. Grease must be used on the parts of the body prone to friction burns, this includes the back of the neck with the constant turning, under the arms, and perhaps the sides of the arms, and between the legs, Vaseline copes very well with this, although some swimmers may prefer to use Lanolin, it must be remembered for the male swimmer, to grease heavily around the neck, front and back, also on the front of the shoulders, remembering how long a male swimmer will be in the water for, his beard will grow, and cause some very bad marks, I have seen swimmers come out of the water, with holes in their shoulders, where a fresh growth of beard has rubbed, likewise a male swimmer should pay particular attention and have a very close shave before a swim.

Summary

If you think this is a load of unnecessary waffle, I am sorry, remember you always have a delete button, but if you think you would like any more information, you can always contact me, I am always on the beach Saturdays and Sundays from 9am or I can be contacted by email on channelgeneral@aol.com I can sometimes be seen on the beach in the week, or even by arrangement, but please remember, I am getting old, I have been sitting on the beach in Dover for some 22 years, and my body is getting a little tired of it.

To many of you out there, this is teaching Grandma to suck eggs, but it may help because even the most experienced swimmers can forget things, a certain Alison Streeter, in the days of France/England swims, got all the way to France, before realizing she had left her swimming costume out of her kit, There were photographers aboard as well **OOPS !!**