

All About Grease!

Mike Oram

Channel grease is made up of about 90% lanolin and 10% Vaseline. You need to mix the 2 together without bringing to the boil and then leave it to cool and set. At least that is the way it is done here in Dover. Some swimmers use other formulas that they have "perfected" for themselves but it is becoming a thing of the past now that training is becoming more sophisticated and preparation more the norm than the exception. You used to be able to order it from "Boots" the chemist in Dover but they have stopped supplying it as demand is dropping fast. Dave and Evelyn at the Varne Ridge Caravan Park have source of traditional Channel Grease. You can e-mail them through their website which is linked to from this site.

The grease does not keep you warm but is very good in small quantities to stop chafing and rubbing. The "keeping you warm" idea is a mental one and some swimmers still smother themselves with it - to boost their mental attitude. Remember the rule - "Never lie to yourself, just everyone else". Prepare for the cold during your training, not hope for help from the grease. The only thing you can rely on is yourself.

The trouble is that the grease gets on everything (Goggles, figures, face, towels, clothes, the boat etc) and can be very frustrating to the swimmer - even to the extent of upsetting their rhythm. It sure does make a mess of the goggles when it gets on them. It also makes a lot of swimmers (and their helpers) feel sick when it is applied. Over the years as a pilot many swimmers have complained of feeling sea sick when it is usually the smell of the grease that is causing the problem.

When in cold water it goes into hard globules and can irritate the swimmer if they have a lot of body hair. If they do not have body hair it will come off of most of the body in the first few hours.

Saying all this some swimmers still swear by it and if it gives you the right mental state then that's your choice. If you are going to use grease to a big extent then remember to take an old track suit or a good covering of old clothes with you, along with a blanket or a couple of big towels as your pilot will not be over impressed if you cover the pilot boat in the stuff. Sitting on fishing nets covered with grease is one thing - the pilot boats we are using with the CS&PF are a bit more luxurious and sitting on the seating or bouncing off the interior does give the pilot and crew a lot of extra work as well as an obnoxious smell in the boat.

All of us carry blankets just in case, but in emergencies the swimmer comes first. The cleaning and replacing is afterwards. Most swimmers - like Alison, Cliff, Marcy etc just use a small amount, and sometimes only Vaseline - but they know that you need to rely on your abilities not any "extras" that can upset the swim pattern.

Mike