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Kitting out a triathlete

It is often said that triathlon is one of the fastest growing sporting codes in the world. In South Africa alone there are 53 triathlon clubs, according to Triathlon South Africa. With a continuous stream of new participants, sport retailers can't afford to ignore this sport or its members' needs.

With the three disciplines in triathlons – swimming, cycling and running, participated in in that order – participants and retailers alike have to keep their focus when it comes to the kit the consumer would need, and that which he might not be allowed to use.

The first discipline is swimming, for which your customer naturally needs something to swim in. Not too complicated ... that is, until you have to recommend and explain the choice between a swimsuit, trisuit or a wetsuit.

Tri- vs wetsuit

- **Trisuit:** designed to be worn during all three disciplines in a triathlon. It is made of a thin moisture wicking material, and is ideal for reducing time during transitions (no time wasted on changing clothing after the swim). During the swimming stage, a trisuit can be worn either on its own or under a wetsuit for added warmth.

The trisuit is designed to be a tight, yet comfortable, fit and comes in a one- or two-piece (shirt and shorts) design – deciding which to wear comes down to personal choice.

For the cycling stage, the bottom features a more lightweight pad (to accommodate a more comfortable swim and run) that also dries quickly. The pad isn't as thick as a normal cycling short's, however, and some consumers might prefer the comfort of a thicker protection.

- **Wetsuit:** designed to keep the wearer warm in cold water. The material may not be thicker than 5mm, and if the wetsuit consists of overlapping items, these may not combine to be thicker than 5mm.

A wetsuit helps increase the wearer's buoyancy, reduces drag, and, of course, protects the wearer if the temperature is very low. A triathlon-specific wetsuit is lighter, more efficient and gives less resistance while swimming than normal.

There is a downside to wearing a wetsuit, however: changing clothing between stages will add to the participant's time.

Some events restrict the use of wetsuits,

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depending on the water temperature and age group your customer is participating in. It's recommended that your customer first investigates any possible restrictions before deciding to opt for a wetsuit. If the event rules state that the athlete may not wear a

wetsuit, the following is also not allowed:

- o Clothing that covers the arms below the shoulder or the legs below the knee. These may be worn after the swim stage.
- o Clothing may not be made of a rubberized material, for example polyurethane or neoprene. Swimwear must be made of natural and/or synthetic yarns that are knitted, woven, and/or braided.
- o Swimwear may not cover the neck and may not contain a zipper.

Swimming accessories

- **Swimming caps** are useful to keep hair out of the way, goggle straps in place (if worn under the cap), and to reduce water resistance. They are also, however, often provided by race organisers.
- Swimmers are allowed to wear **swim goggles**, the curved lenses of which enhance peripheral vision and filter UV rays. Your customer will also benefit from an antifog solution for the goggles.
- **Ear and nose plugs** can be used to keep water out.

Running and cycling stages

During the cycling and running stages, participants must cover their torsos at all times.

Footwear should benefit your customer's transition times. It is possible to cycle in running shoes (to reduce transition time between the stages), but cycling shoes will assist the wearer better during cycling.

- The stiff soles on cycling shoes offer a greater power transfer from push to the pedal.
- Racing flat shoes are fine for shorter triathlons, but training shoes are best for the longer distances.
- Shoes that close with one or two hook-and-loop straps, allow faster changing.
- A loop at the heel helps the participant pull on the shoe easier.

Elastic laces and toggles on the laces help shorten the transition period when putting on and changing footwear.

Many triathletes run and cycle without **socks**, to lower the time used during transition. Recommend to your customer that he not try this for the first time during his event, as he will likely end up with raw skin and blood on his shoes and blisters on his feet from the heat, moisture and friction – he should **To p48**



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try it a few times during practice first.

- If he goes sockless, recommend he adds powder or lubricant to potential hotspots inside the shoes.
- If he wants to wear socks during the triathlon, recommend he wears a pair with moisture wicking qualities, preferably made from synthetics or merino wool. Cotton socks will get (and stay) wet.

A **race belt** will also help shave off seconds – instead of worrying about safety pins during transition, the participant can pin his race number to the belt and just put the belt on.

Wearing **sunglasses** is very important while running and cycling. Not only does it protect from the sun, it stops bugs, dirt, etc. from entering the eyes.

The sunglasses should be lightweight and fit comfortably. It shouldn't be able to fall off: grippy nose pads and temple ends will help keep the sunglasses in place.

Sport lenses with the following qualities can benefit the wearer:

- **Impact resistant:** your customer needs strong lenses so that they don't break when coming into contact with debris;
- **Polycarbonate lenses:** impact-resistant and won't shatter if hit by a sharp or hard object;
- **Polarized lenses:** reduce glare, which is especially useful when on shiny asphalt or if the stage takes part within eyesight of water.

It can, however, make it difficult to see road irregularities in shady areas and may not be the best solution for the cyclist in an aggressive position, where he'll look through the lenses at an angle.

- **Photochromic lenses:** these automatically adjust to changing light intensities and conditions (darker in bright, and lighter in dark light). The process, however, isn't instant and takes longer in cold conditions.
- While most sunglasses these days provide **UVA and UVB protection**, it's important to make sure when recommending a pair.

The colour of the lenses affect the amount of light that reaches the eyes, how well the wearer will see other colours, as well as how he sees contrasts.

- Dark colours (brown, grey, green): cut through glare and reduce eyestrain in moderate-to-bright conditions. Grey and green won't distort colours, but brown might. These colours are good for most outdoor activities.
- Light colours (yellow, gold, amber, rose, vermilion): excellent for moderate-to-low light conditions, providing great depth perception and letting the surroundings appear brighter.

Lens coatings:

- **Anti-fog:** prevents sweat from fogging up the lenses.
- **Anti-scratch:** improves the durability of the lens.
- **Hydrophobic:** repels water.

- **Mirrored:** a reflective film on the outside surface of the lens that reduces glare by reflecting light away. These coatings make objects appear darker, so should be paired with a lighter tint to compensate.

Some sunglasses have **frames**, while others are frameless.

- In an *aggressive* position, a cyclist might find that a frame across the top of the lenses obstructs his view, and would prefer a frameless pair of sunglasses.
- If you customer prefers to be able to change his lenses he'll need a pair of sunglasses with a frame.
 - o Interchangeable lenses allow the wearer to adjust for changing light conditions.

Larger lenses and a frame that wraps around the eyes and face will offer the wearer more protection.

Cycling

During the cycling stage triathletes are required to wear a **helmet**. It must be approved and may not be altered (including the chin strap).

- A road helmet typically has a lightweight and ergonomic construction, with ventilation to allow the head to stay cool.
- A mountain bike helmet features visors and coverage on the back of the head for added protection, as well as airvents.

Recommending a bicycle:

The bicycle must conform to the following:

- Length: max 2m;
- Width: max 75cm;
- Ground to the center of the chain wheel axle: at least 24cm;
- Saddle: the front may not be more than 5cm in front, or more than 15cm behind, the center of the chain wheel axle. The saddle must also not be able to be adjusted beyond these limits;
- Front-to-center distance (distance between the center of the chain wheel axle and the center of the front axle): min 54cm;
 - o Min 50cm, if the distance between the center of the chain wheel axle and the top of the saddle (measured 14cm behind the front point of the saddle) is less than 71cm;
 - o Max: the greater size between 65cm or 7/8 of the distance between the center of the chain wheel axle and the top of the saddle (measured 14cm behind the front point of the saddle);
- Wheels:
 - o Front wheel: spoke construction and may not be solid.
 - o Rear wheel: spoke or solid construction.
 - o Wheel covers only allowed on the rear wheel,
 - o Wheels may be of different diameters.
- Handlebar ends must be plugged, to lessen the possibility of injury.
- One working brake on each wheel.
- May not use fairings.

There are different bicycle styles to choose from:

- **Tri bike:** built specifically for participating in triathlons and for maximum speed. It is more expensive, and not all brands offer a tri-option. If you customer is planning to be a regular triathlete competitor, however, he should consider this type of bicycle. The specialist features are:
 - o Aerodynamic: it is designed in such a way that the racer is positioned more forward over the front wheel, which improves aerodynamics.
 - o Good for legs: works hamstrings more efficiently, which helps the legs in the next phase (running).
 - o It's more difficult to manoeuvre, has no drop handlebars, braking is not as convenient as general riding bicycles, and it can be uncomfortable for long rides.
- **Road bike:** for the customer who wants a bike for general-purpose riding, as well as for use in triathlons. It can be customised to make it better for triathlons by adding components such as aero bars, bullhorns or disc wheels.
- **Mountain bike:** use for a triathlon only if it'll take place on trails.

Cycling gloves are a matter of personal comfort and whether the participant wants to spend the time putting them on.

A **spare tube** and a **repair kit** could mean the difference between finishing the race or not.

Other accessories

Don't forget about other useful extras such as:

- **Carry aids:** as your customer has to get the gear to the race, remind him to consider a bag. A tri gear bag has pockets specifically designed for certain items, e.g. helmet or shoes, and provides easy access to gear, which means a shorter transition time.
- **First-aid:** items to treat minor cuts, blisters and crashes, such as blister treatment, bandages, etc.
- **Fitness monitor:** the race is timed and recorded, but a fitness monitor will help your customer gain immediate information to assess his race strategy on-the-go.
- **Hydration:** races usually have stations, but participants can carry their own hydration with them as well in a hydration pack, belt, or in a water bottle on his bicycle.
- **Lube:** for added comfort in a race longer than a sprint, participants lube the body with anti-chafing.
 - o Swim stage: lube from elbows to wrists, knees to ankles and on the feet will help a wetsuit go on easier.
 - o Cycling stage: chamois cream on the skin or shorts will provide some relief from friction.
 - o Run stage: lube sensitive areas such as nipples and bra lines.
 - o If running and/or cycling sockless, lube the shoes and feet.
- **Sunscreen,** preferably waterproof and SPF 30 or higher.