













Otter Aquatics Newsletter

No 32. December 2017

Dear swimmers and others

Welcome to the December 2017 edition of the Otter Aquatics newsletter. This a bumper issue of 12 pages to make up for none in January 2018. Your eyes can take a break from having to read these newsletters over the holiday period with the next one due out in February 2018.

Look inside to find:

-  A note about our Adult Learn-to-Swim, Stroke Correction and Swimfit sessions over the Christmas-New Year period
-  Stroke tip of the month: Forward Quadrant Strokking (FQS)
-  Random thoughts on ocean swimming
-  Ocean swimmers are stupid?
-  19th century advice to women swimmers
-  A report on 'The Iconic and Historic Swimming Places of Sydney' Swimtour and the Cockatoo Island swim
-  In defence of the gadget – a heretical piece by a guest writer
-  The second in the series of strengthening our core: the obliques
-  An update on the 2018 European swimming tours – including a couple of fabulous new ones
-  And our quiz, quote and pic of the month.

I hope everyone has a good Christmas and New Year. Stay safe in and around the water, watch your kids, keep up your fitness and remember to **Slip** on a shirt, **Slop** on sunscreen, **Slap** on a hat, **Seek** shade or shelter and **Slide** on some sunnies.

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Sunday swimming over Christmas–New Year

Christmas is rapidly approaching if we need yet another reminder. However, it will probably impact very little on our Sunday Adult Learn-to-Swim, Stroke Correction and Swimfit sessions as, with a lot of amazing skill, we appear to have carefully avoided public holidays falling on a Sunday this year.

So I intend to be at Murrumba Downs pool as usual on the Sunday mornings 24 December and 31 December and then into January. What better way to prepare yourself for (or recover from) Christmas–New Year festivities by getting a good workout in the pool!

Stroke tip of the month: Forward Quadrant Strokling (FQS) – also known as Front Quadrant Strokling or Asymmetrical Stroke Timing

FQS is not as complicated as the name implies (but then, nothing is when you know how). Its aim is to make your swimming more efficient and, as with all efficiency gains with swimming, you can use it to swim faster, swim for longer or just to know that you are swimming well. As with any new technique in swimming, it might feel a little awkward at first but, with a little practice, it will become commonplace (remember: it's all about training your brain, not so much your body). With a little basic understanding of a couple of principles of physics, it isn't all that hard to understand.

What is it? It is a technique of timing your freestyle arm stroking – the timing of one arm against the other – in order to decrease drag caused by interruptions in stroking, as well as to make the body as long in distance as possible and for as long in time as possible. Ever wondered why tall people seem to exert less effort in moving through the water? Well, if your genes result in you being a little horizontally challenged in the water compared with another swimmer, with a more efficient FQS, you will be able to beat that tall streak of s...t.

Scientific principles behind FQS. The first principle is **deceleration**. We all know that the arms provide propulsion (actually, they don't; they are just the delivery mechanism for propulsive forces generated by the core – but we will leave that aside for the moment) and, if the arms are not providing propulsion, even if just for a moment, then our body decelerates – just like putting the brakes on – and we don't want that.

The second principle is to do with the **theoretical hull speed** of a vessel – in this case the vessel is you and its hull is your body. It has a lot to do with the increased drag a vessel generates as its speed increases. For the mathematically inclined, the maximum theoretical hull speed of a vessel in knots is 1.34 times the square root of the load waterline length in feet ($HS = 1.34 \times \sqrt{LWL}$). So there! Don't ask me what all this means; I'm really just showing off about something I read in a book. Generally speaking, the longer and narrower the vessel/hull, the faster is its maximum hull speed (consider the shape of a rowing skiff or a surf ski). Its application for a swimmer's body is that *you should be making your body as long as you can from your finger tips stretched out in front to the tips of your toes stretched out behind*. Put another way, *you should be making your body as long as you can in distance for as long as you can in time*. And, by constantly rotating your body, you reduce the width profile of your 'hull' to the water.

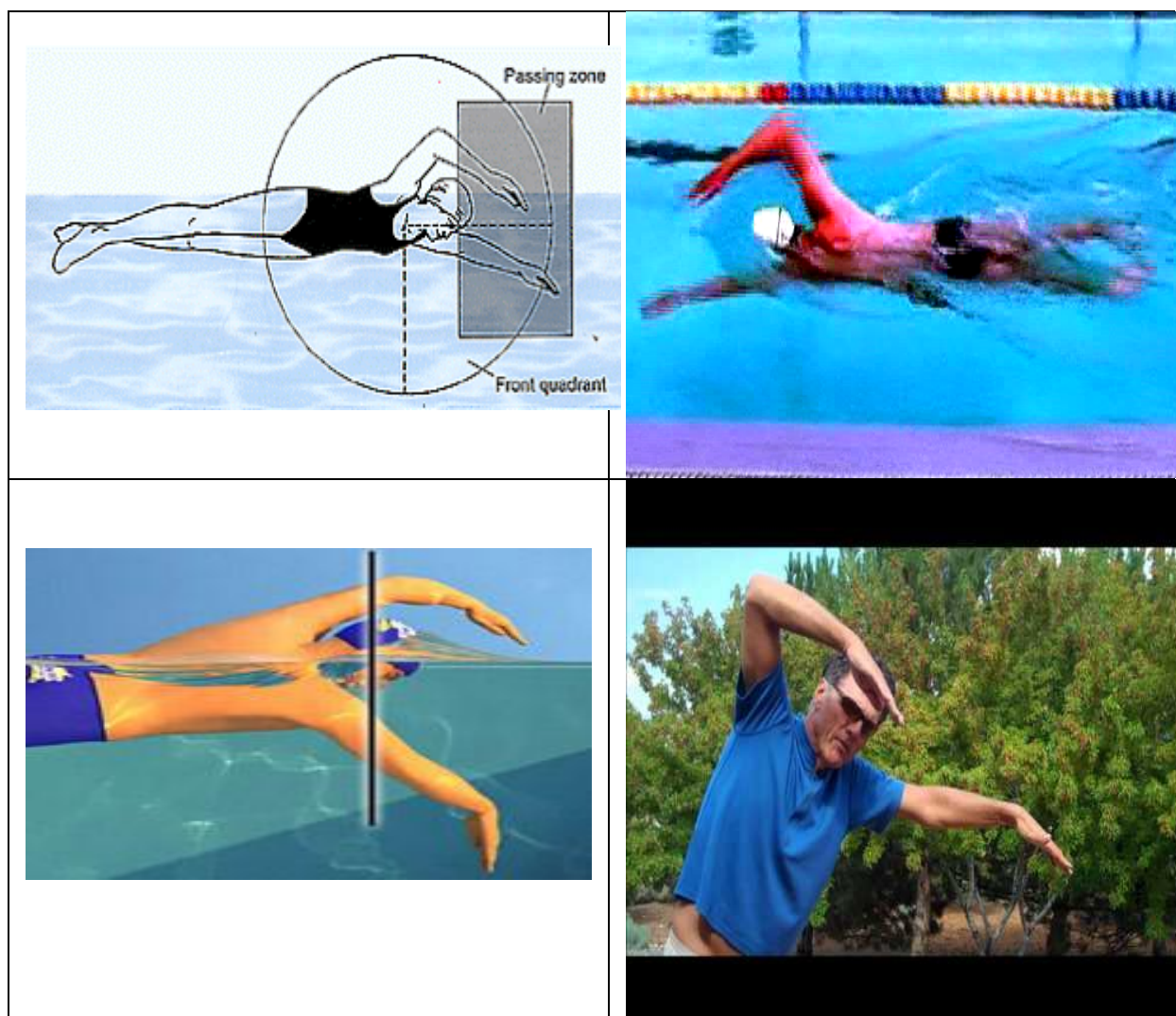
How do you do it? It is all about the timing of one arm's stroke against the other. As one arm reaches its full extension (or reach) out in front and prepares for the catch, the other hand is

alongside your head, ready to commence its extension/reach. As the first arm goes into the catch, the second arm is at its full extension. Therefore, using the deceleration principle above, there is as little delay in the propulsive parts of the arm stroke as possible and, hence, little time for the body to slow down (decelerate). Using the same principle, you should not 'over-extend'; as soon as you reach full extension, you should go into your catch. And using the hull speed principle, your body is moving as fast as it can through the water (subject to the power of the motor, i.e. your strength and fitness).

Remember doing *Catch-Up Freestyle* (CUFS) when you learned to swim – and the CUFS drills we do from time to time in our swimfit and stroke correction sessions? FQS can be seen as 'almost CUFS', but without the hands actually touching. Another way to think of FQS is that it is the opposite of *windmilling* – where one arm is in front and one arm behind with no arm providing propulsion at that moment and the body effectively is as *short* as it can be. Not good – except for beginners.

When should you do it? Some coaches recommend it just for sprinting, but I can't see why you should not try to do it all the time.

A few images may help:








Strengthening your core and obliques #2

In this second in our series on core strengthening exercises, we consider our obliques.





What are they? They are the muscles that run around and along the sides of our torso from the lower part of the ribs down to the pelvis. Our main swimming propulsive muscles are in our 'core', of which the obliques are an important component.

Why do we need to strengthen them? Oblique exercises strengthen our swimming propulsive muscles but, unfortunately, do nothing to get rid of our 'love handles'. Site-specific fatness cannot be rid of by specific exercises; you have to lose weight to do that.

V Sit Twist

-  Sit on the floor with your knees bent at 45 degrees
-  Engage your core and lean back to about 30 degrees keeping your back straight
-  Pick up a weight from the floor on one side of your body and move it, under control, to the other side. A weight can be almost anything such as a plastic milk bottle full of water. Use a weight that you can handle.
-  Repeat ten times
-  To progress, increase the speed or the weight or both.

Some random thoughts on ocean swimming

-  At the start of an event, chaos reigns. You splash in and are instantly surrounded by bodies all fighting for the same patch of water. Legs, arms and bodies interact
-  The surf is up, the current is pulling you sideways, your goggles are fogging, you are looking straight into the sun, your heart rate is elevated and you are struggling to breathe
-  But, then you hit your rhythm, your breathing becomes slow, regular and deep. As such, swimming is like yoga or meditation, where the breath is paramount. The deep inhalations and exhalations are simultaneously calming and invigorating
-  You feel great afterwards. There is something mood-altering about ocean swimming.

Ocean swimmers are stupid?

Really? Check this out this take on ocean swimming and wetsuits:

<https://www.facebook.com/OceanFit/videos/1977614215588305/>

Remember: you are a real ocean swimmer if you turn up and give it a go, not whether you wear a wetsuit – or win a race for that matter.

'The Iconic and Historic Swimming Places of Sydney' Swimtour and the Cockatoo Island swim

From 13 to 20 November, seven of us took part in the 'Iconic and Historic Swimming Places of Sydney' swimtour in which we visited and swam where the greats of Australian swimming learned their craft. We visited Bronte Baths (where freestyle was developed), Bronte Beach (where the world's first surf lifesaving club was formed), Wylie's Baths (where Mina Wylie and Fanny Durack trained), the ladies-only McIver Baths and Murray Rose Pool (where the great man learned to swim and trained) as well as Bondi and Manly and many other places of swimming interest and a few not directly associated with swimming. I will be repeating these trips twice a year in March and November so long as there is sufficient interest. For info, check out <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/sydney.html>.

On Sunday 19 November, a number of us in Sydney participated in the annual 1.1k swim to Cockatoo Island and back, or the 2.5k swim around Cockatoo Island. Both swims started and finished at the Dawn Fraser Baths ('Dawnies') on Sydney Harbour at Balmain. And they were good.

The swims themselves had their heritage value. For more than 140 years, Cockatoo Island was a shipbuilding yard and dockyard and, before that, a convict women's prison. The same waters saw Australia's first aquatic festival 135 years ago. Alas, the festival was restricted to sailing and rowing – few people swam in those days as either they didn't know how to, or most people considered our wondrous sport as ungentelemanly or unladylike. These days UNESCO-listed Cockatoo Island is a museum, a camping ground and a major cultural venue for art, film and music.

A highlight of the round-island swim was swimming under the bridge between the land and the ferry pontoon on the northern side of the island (see the green letter F on the map below). We also had an audience of island day-trippers cheering and clapping us on as we passed. Both swims encountered a lot of jelly fish – but they were of the non-stinging variety; just lots of slimy blobs to grab onto with every stroke.

While it was an excellent swim with the water temp being just fine at 22 degrees (compared with just 16 degrees at Sydney's ocean beaches on the day), there were no categories for swimmers 'of a certain age', with the most senior age category being 56+. Had there been a 66+ age category, our one swimmer who did the round island swim would have been the fastest. Our one male swimmer in the 1.1k swim would have come third and our one female swimmer in the 1.1k swim would have come fourth in their age groups. So, congratulations all round. Let's hope there are better age categories next time.

Check out the map and pics that follow:

Google Maps interface showing a measured path around Cockatoo Island and the Convict Precinct in the Parramatta River. The path is marked with white dots and lines, with distances of 1.50 km, 500.00 m, 2.00 km, and 2.35 km. A 'Measure distance' pop-up shows a total area of 257,393.70 m² (2,770,562.78 ft²) and a total distance of 2.35 km (1.46 mi). The map includes labels for Spectacle Island, Bataan Island, Schnapper Island, and various streets like Albert St and St Georges Cres. The bottom of the screen shows the Windows taskbar with the search bar and several application icons.

Search Google Maps

Measure distance

Click on the map to add to your path

Total area: 257,393.70 m² (2,770,562.78 ft²)

Total distance: 2.35 km (1.46 mi)

Imagery ©2017 Google, Map data ©2017 Google Australia Terms Send feedback 100 m

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Cockatoo Island, once a dockyard, now a heritage-listed cultural site



A 'water polo' start








Swimming under the ferry bridge



The finish – many helping hands to get us out of the water

Women's swimming advice

Here are a few quotes (without comment) from a mid 19th Century British publication encouraging women to swim:

-  '... when you swim, do not go about like a floating coffin, but be cheerful, enjoy yourself'
-  'There is nothing so disastrous in effect to a woman's hair as sea-water'
-  'Delicate women should always have a little drink before entering the water'
-  'It is advisable to take a few drops of Malaga or port before entering the sea'
-  'Swimming eases backaches caused by the languid movements which are often encouraged in girls as being more graceful'.

Should we rely on gadgetry or our brain? A rejoinder 'In defence of the gadget'

I thought last month's article would elicit some responses and cause the techos to lift their heads away from their screens at least for a moment. And I wasn't wrong. Here is **Tracey Lloyd's** rejoinder, un-fiddled with by me no matter how much I wanted to (I was quite proud of my self restraint actually) and written on her iPad with her Bluetooth keyboard attached (whatever those terms mean):

Swimming provides many wonderful opportunities to be mindful and present. The sun warming your skin and creating highlights in the azure no wait turquoise no it's jade water, salty or chlorine filled air bringing to mind memories of distant summer holidays, young and carefree, the water gently caressing you with a lover's touch. In order for your brain to appreciate these gifts from nature and find a peaceful theta wave state you need help. In her book *Thrive* (2014), Arianna Huffington, founder of the Huffington Post posed the question 'does the technology deepen the experience or does it diminish it?' In the case of swimming I argue that the use of technology deepens the experience.

In January this year I added the Garmin Swim to my arsenal of swim improving activities. It is able to identify the stroke I am swimming, count the laps, monitor the time I've swum by lap and total water time (great for checking procrastination habits) and track the total distance. Taking away the drudgery of these tasks allows me the mental freedom to:

- enjoy my surroundings and notice where the lane line might need repainting or where a tile has cracked;
- ensure that my breathing is relaxed and rhythmical;
- mindfully watch my elbows to ensure that I am achieving the hallowed high elbow;
- become one with the natural world as I roll through the water concentrating on my hips and ensuring that I'm not flat in the water;

- look forward as my hand enters the water and feel the stretch through my arm muscles as I strive to get the longest length from my vessel to slipstream through the pool, ocean or street puddle;
- have enough brain cells free to dismiss thoughts about work and other land based worries that try and pop into my head while swimming;
- have data to reflect and analyse (out of the water) on my growth as a swimmer; and
- leave the water feeling refreshed, re-energised and with the knowledge that I have achieved my day's training goal.

The benefits of gadgetry don't only apply to the water; once the device is linked to the wonders of the World Wide Web you can revisit the history of your swimming adventures, see how your speed and endurance have developed over the last month, quarter or year. The depth of learning about your stroke and more importantly your mindset to swimming is endless. For instance, my evidence has shown me that I swim faster on a weekday morning, when I'm conscious of the need to reach my goal and then get to work but my endurance is better in the late afternoon/early evening when I'm swimming to clear my head and leave the cares of the day in the water. With the knowledge gleaned from my electronic monitor I have increased the enjoyment of each swim as I am able to plan activities in advance and schedule breathing ladder exercises for those afternoon swims when I am feeling strong rather than struggle through them in the morning when my focus is on my goal.

Some would argue that this confidence could be obtained by using Luddite technologies: the swim journal, pen and paper or your brain. I don't doubt that this is possible however I prefer to use pen and paper for intangible experiences: thoughts, feelings, discoveries. The computing power of my electronic friend handles the drudgery of the swim (counting laps and time) and leaves me free to use my brain for higher order thinking.

It isn't the case that I strapped the Garmin on and became a better swimmer immediately; rather the improvements to my swimming came from countless stroke correction drills (one arm stroking, fingernail drag, forward quadrant stroking and other Sunday morning tortures) and learning about swimming. The Garmin has become part of my knowledge base and the confidence gained from seeing my improvements in a very visual display has allowed me to break free from the confines of the pool and find relaxation, enjoyment and achievement in open water swimming.

I'll admit gadgets aren't for everyone but for some of us tech nerds they enhance our swimming experience and deepen our connection with the water and our sense of self.

2018 European swimming holidays



The deadline for registration for each of our three planned 2018 European swimming holidays is **31st December 2017**. So, if you want to come along, there is little time to delay – so get in touch soon.

At the moment, we have insufficient starters for any of the 2018 trips to be feasible. A minimum number for each trip is six. If I do not get sufficient numbers by the end of December, I will postpone the 2018 plans and reschedule them for similar dates in 2019.

-  **27th August to 2nd September 2018. Italy's Lake Orta.** This, our flagship tour, will be similar to the 2017 trip. See <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/orta.html>
-  **5th to 12th September 2018. Cycling and Swimming Tour of Lake Constance.** This will also be similar to the 2017 trip. See: <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/constance.html>
-  **13th to 21st September 2018. Symi Island, Greece.** See: <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/greece.html>


A possible new addition or two (or alternatives) to our 2019 European swimming holidays

As mentioned above, I will be offering the same swimming holidays planned for 2018 in 2019. But wait ... there's more. Get in touch with me sometime over the next few months if you think you may be interested in either or both of the following European swims either in addition to, or instead of, the ones mentioned above. The Baltic one would be in August 2019 and the Gibraltar one in September 2019.


-  **A Baltic swimming challenge.** This would involve a few days of gentle lake swimming in and around Helsinki in Finland to get over our jetlag and to get acclimatised. Then we would fly or go by ferry to either Lithuania or Latvia for a week of lake swimming. Then it would be a train trip through Estonia, a ferry back to Helsinki and then by train north to a lake within Finland's Arctic Circle for a week of 'very special' swimming. Hey, it will be in the northern summer and the water will be warm, ok? What is warm? About 16 degrees (wetsuits optional). Am I bonkers? Yes, of course I am, but I'm serious about this one!
-  **Swimming the Straits of Gibraltar.** A 16k relay for teams of four in multiples of 30 minute swim legs – so about four 30 minute legs of one kilometre each. This would require about three weeks of staying in Spain in early to mid September to allow for participation in the training program, selection in a group and to allow for alternative crossing dates in case of bad weather. The water temp would likely be between 18 and 20 degrees. If you can do the Baltic one, you can certainly do this.

Quiz of the month

The answers to last month's two part question are as follows:

-  Who is in a better position to adapt to swimming in cold water: a person with a lot of body fat or one who is very lean?

Answer: the one with greater body fat as it provides insulation against cold water

-  Does applying Vaseline, lanolin, pig fat or other gunk insulate our bodies from cold water?

Answer: No. It is ineffectual and a waste of time (but it may be useful against chafing).

One of our swimmers got the first question right but no one got the second. So the prize jackpots – two tubs of lard this month.

As with last month, this month's question is in two parts.

In her day, Australian swimmer **Sarah Frances "Fanny" Durack** (1889 – 1956) was the world's greatest female swimmer over all distances. She won the gold medal and established the world record in the 100 metre freestyle at the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm becoming the first Australian woman to win an Olympic gold medal in a swimming event.

Question 1: Where did Fanny learn to swim?

Question 2: Who was Fanny's best friend, training partner, greatest rival and silver medallist in Stockholm? For a bonus, where did she learn to swim?

Quote of the month: two of them again this month

'... we swam with a joy found only in the weightlessness of water.'

Jessica J. Lee, *Turning: A Swimming Memoir*

'Water has always held the magical power to cure ... I can dive in with a long face and what feels like a terminal case of depression, and come out a whistling idiot.'

Roger Deakin, *Waterlog*

(Ed: images of a 'millennial' dancing along the streets of Balmain.)

Pic of the month



Holiday Sketch at Coogee, Tom Roberts, 1888

