



Otter Aquatics Newsletter

No 31. November 2017

Dear swimmers and others

Welcome to the November 2017 edition of the Otter Aquatics newsletter.

Look inside to find:

-  A notice about a **Bronze Medallion** course coming up before Christmas. Let me know if you or anyone you know are interested
-  Stroke tip of the month: 'Don't look up'
-  A think piece on the choice between using electronic gadgetry or your brain in your swimming training
-  A new series on exercises for swimming: 'Strengthening your core and obliques'
-  An interesting article on swimming philosophy
-  An update on drowning statistics in Australia
-  Details of our three 2018 European swimming holidays
-  And our quiz, quote and pic of the month.

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Bronze Medallion

I will be conducting a Bronze Medallion course sometime prior to Christmas for anyone interested. The Bronze Medallion is the foremost aquatic lifesaving qualification and has been delivered in Australia by the Royal Lifesaving Society for over 100 years. I am licensed by Royal Lifesaving to conduct its courses.

Why do it? The course will enhance your personal survival skills while providing you with the knowledge and skills to develop the level of judgement, technique and physical ability required to safely carry out aquatic rescues. The course includes CPR and attracts a nationally-recognised qualification under the Vocational and Technical Training (VET) system.

To hold the Bronze Medallion is an entry-point qualification for anyone considering employment in the aquatics industry and is a component of the Pool Lifeguard course. It can also be considered to be a general milestone in swimming and water safety competence. But it is not good enough to say 'I did my Bronze 20 or 30 years ago'. Much has changed since then and continues to change.

You need to be at least 14 years of age ('oldies' are very welcome). Of course, you need to be a competent, or 'good enough', swimmer but it is certainly not necessary to be a competitive-level swimmer.

The course will be conducted over a Saturday and a Sunday afternoon in late November or early December. The cost will be \$170. The venue will be a pool in Brisbane's north. If you are interested, contact me on 0438 652 696 or mark@otteraquatics.com.au and I will keep you informed when it will be held.



Stroke tip of the month: Don't look up

The position of the head in swimming is perhaps the biggest single contributor to a good body profile. A good body profile means maintaining the body in as horizontal a position as possible in order to keep drag to a minimum. In freestyle, this means that you should keep your head in a neutral position – i.e. looking directly at the bottom of the pool, not ahead – when exhaling. If you are in the habit of looking ahead, change your head position to looking down and you should experience an immediate feeling of greater buoyancy as your hips and legs will be raised closer to the surface. This will reduce the drag of the water on the lower part of your body and you will therefore swim more streamlined and more efficiently. Also, by looking up or ahead, even if only a little, you may strain your neck and develop neck pain.

You should also keep your head steady while exhaling and while you are looking to the bottom of the pool. You need only turn it to the side (or, more concisely, allow your head to come up with your shoulder) when you inhale. In normal three-stroke breathing (also known as bilateral or alternate breathing), this will mean that you keep your head still for two out of the three strokes. If you move your head from side-to-side while exhaling, even if only a little, your body alignment (how straight your body is in the water) will suffer and you will 'snake' through the water, which also creates drag. In the open water, this will contribute to going off course which you then have to correct with arm movements and which itself contributes to drag, wastes valuable energy and slows you down.

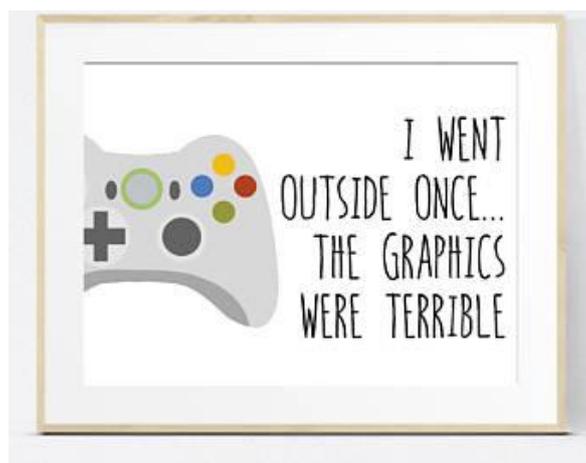
Should we rely on gadgetry or our brain?

Let's go straight to the answer to this vexed question – our brain. Simple. As we all know – or should know – swimming is very much a cerebral sport or pursuit. When we are swimming, we are constantly thinking (at least we should be) – about our technique, our lap count, our stroke length, our stroke count or, in the open water, how straight we are swimming or where we are (pretty essential if you think about it). And I haven't even started on the more nebulous cerebral things like mindfulness (being in the present, not the past nor the future) or my favourite, 'Zen' swimming.

Of course, there are a lot of electronic gadgets on the market these days to tell us how many strokes per lap we achieved, what lap we are on, etc. But isn't that why we have a brain? If we don't use our brain to calculate these things in the water, what is it going to do? Get bored, that's what. We will put billions of neurons to sleep and we will get disillusioned with swimming and give up. If we lose count of our laps (always a possibility), then train your brain to get it right next time. Sure it takes effort, but the brain health benefits are significant.

Another benefit of turning on your brain is that you get immediate feedback. You instantly know your SPL (strokes per lap), or any other measure, without having to stop to look at your device or, worse still, having to wait till you get home to download the data onto your computer.

And be careful with using GPS gadgets in the open water. I don't want to say never use them because they clearly can be useful but they can be temperamental beasts. On more than one occasion, I have swum one of my standard lengths of 650 metres (I know its length because I have measured it on a map and, yes, I have used Google maps) only for a swimming companion with a wired wrist to tell me that it is 350 metres or 1500 metres or something else outrageous. He always tries to explain his way out of it using some silly nerdy excuse but, clearly, his expensive device gave a wrong answer and, if he had simply used his brain, he would have got the right one. So brain is always better.



And, while we are on the topic, don't bother with plugging in a water proof music device, or go over the problems of work in your head or planning what's for dinner. You shouldn't have time to do those things because your brain will be constantly working on other, more important, stuff. And swimming is the ideal way to dissociate yourself from the tedium of work or problems at home.

Strengthening your core and obliques

This is the first in a new series on core strengthening exercises. It is our core – or our torso – including our hip flexors, abdoms and lats – that provides the propulsive power for freestyle swimming. Our shoulders and arms are merely the delivery mechanism.

Lower body twist

- 🧘 Lie on your back with your knees raised, your lower legs horizontal and your upper legs at 90 degrees to the lower legs
- 🧘 Outstretch your arms in a T in line with your shoulders
- 🧘 Keeping your knees together, rotate your legs to one side in a slow controlled manner while exhaling – and then rotate back to the centre while inhaling and then rotate to the other side while exhaling; all the time keeping your shoulders on the floor. Roll your head to the side opposite your legs.
- 🧘 Repeat ten times.



Swimming philosophy

Frequent readers of this little epistle – and countless other people – will have been bombarded to the point of despair with my frequently related philosophical ideas on swimming. You will be delighted – or shocked – to know that others share my views. My approach was developed after ‘only’ a quadruple coronary artery bypass; this guy’s followed a double lung transplant:

There is something awe-inspiring, humbling and even mystical about open water. Therein lies the attraction. Space is seemingly limitless on all sides – above, below, all around you. Just as Zen Buddhism emphasises the use of meditation and intuition, so open water swimming can provide its own source of peace and serenity. Open water swimming fills the mental space normally filled by the problems and distractions of day-to-day life.

 Gavin Maitland, quoted in *Outdoor Swimmer*. May 2017

Drowning statistics in Australia over the years: an improvement?

| Year | Population | Drowning deaths |
|------|------------|-----------------|
| 1929 | 7 million | 493 |
| 1990 | 17 million | 300 |
| 2017 | 25 million | 291 |

So we’ve got it right with water safety these days, right? The families of the 291 don’t think so.

Read the National Drowning Report:

https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/20260/RLS_NDR2017_Report_LR.pdf

2018 European swimming holidays

The deadline for registration for each of our three 2018 European swimming holidays is **31st December 2017**. So, if you want to come along, there is little time to delay in letting me know.

-  **27th August to 2nd September 2018. Italy’s Lake Orta.** This, our flagship tour, will be similar to this year’s – 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 this year’s – see: <http://www.otteraquatics.com.au/constance.html>
 -  **13th to 21st September 2018. Symi Island, Greece** – for the 2017 trip see: <http://www.strel-swimming.com/s1a252/swimming-holidays-greece/symi-swimming-odyssey-7-days.html>.
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Quiz of the month

This month's question is in two parts and both are related to swimming in cold water:

- 🍌 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?
- 🍌 Does applying Vaseline, lanolin, pig fat or other gunk insulate our bodies from cold water? See this picture of the late Des Renford, champion Australian marathon swimmer, preparing for one of his English Channel swims, appropriately smothered



The answer to last month's quiz question ('By what name do Americans call Venice?') is Vena Sitaly. If you don't get it, I feel sorry for you. But no one got it, or at least no one responded, so I get to feel sorry for absolutely no one. Plus I get to keep the prize for myself, which is a return trip for two to Vena Sitaly flying first class and staying in five star accommodation for a month. So there – you have to read the newsletter to win prizes (big ones or little ones).

Quote of the month – two of them this month

'(Water) ... carries us into recesses of feeling otherwise impenetrable'

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

'You are in nature, part and parcel of it, in a far more complete and intense way than on dry land, and your sense of the present is overwhelming'

Roger Deakin, *Waterlog*

Pic of the month



The view from our hotel across Italy's Lake Orta in August

