

SWIMRUNNER

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NEW!
SWIMRUN
MAGAZINE



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GETTING THE RUN HABIT • BETTER TOGETHER • OTILLŌ MALTA • LISTINGS

Welcome to Swimrunner!



Images: Pierre Menager

At the finish line of the inaugural Ötillö Swimrun Catalina

The swimrun season got off to a strong start at the beginning of March with the inaugural Ötillö Swimrun Catalina, the first Ötillö to take place in America. Tough conditions and a strong racing field made for a highly competitive race and an adrenaline-fuelled start of the 2020 swimrun season. As the first Ötillö World Series race in America, swimrun has now officially gone global, with a total of 108 teams from 18 different nations travelling to Catalina, 40km off the coast of Los Angeles in southern California.

This second issue of *Swimrunner* is designed to help get you up to speed with running. Trail running coach Jude Palmer gives us some great advice on how to introduce running into your training, and also dispels some running myths! I find trail running very akin to outdoor swimming – it allows you to get out in nature and see the world from a different perspective.

Swimrun athlete Mike Alexander introduces us to the joys of team work, extolling the virtues of team racing. For those of us used to the more solitary sport of open water swimming, working as part of a team can be a new skill to learn. Mike explains why it is worth it and gives us some top tips on how to work effectively with your race partner.

Finally, we report from Ötillö Swimrun Malta, where Team Outdoor Swimmer took on difficult technical trails and challenging swims in a tough race full of surprises.

At the time of writing, government guidelines concerning coronavirus and exercising outdoors allow for running and outdoor swimming but please observe social distancing – and please follow up-to-date advice if the situation changes. Look after yourselves and your loved ones.

Finally, a big thank you to Head for sponsoring *Swimrunner* and making it possible.

Jonathan Cowie
Editor, *Swimrunner*

Better together



Mike Alexander extols the virtues of team racing

One of the joys of swimrun is the shared experience. But racing with a partner can be a barrier to participation. Adopted from the adventure racing world, racing in teams plays a part in your safety; the harder the race, the more important your partner becomes. With the introduction of shorter and less exposed courses there is often a solo option, but it's not as good as racing in a team.

HOW TO FIND A RACE PARTNER

If you have a network of swimming or running buddies it shouldn't be too hard. If not, one option is to enter a solo race, stick around for the post-race social and see if any of the other solos fancy teaming up next time. It's worth emailing race organisers as they can sometimes help match you up.

Mike's tip of the month

Write the run and swim distances on your arm or hand paddies. Use the smooth inside of your forearm, as writing on the hairy part is more likely to rub off over the course of a race.

Happiness is only
real when shared

Chris McCandless

Or post on the event Facebook page. Maybe look closer to home. Have you got a family member who you could convince to join you? There are several husband-wife, sibling, and parent-child teams and if you are travelling to a race it's nice to share travel and accommodation costs too.

Once you've found a race partner, you need to become an effective team.

IDENTIFY YOUR INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS

Compare your times for a 400m pool swim and 5km parkrun as a baseline. Then compare your times for a 1.5km open water swim and a 10km trail run, ideally wearing your race day kit. Note who is the best at sighting, swimming in a straight line and running on technical terrain. Once you know your individual strengths you can decide on how you will operate as a team come race day.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT RACE

All swimruns are different. Check the swim to run ratio, the longest swim, longest run, the amount of ascent, terrain, number of transitions, expected weather & water temperature, aid stations, and cut-offs. Often there are videos and photos of previous years which can help you build a picture of whether a race is right for your team.

SHOULD WE USE A TETHER?

Towing makes drafting easy, keeps you together and can therefore increase your team swim speed. The bigger the difference between individual swim speeds the more benefit you'll get from using it. However, I still use it even when I race with a partner with the same swim speed and we take turns leading.

The tether can be of benefit on the runs too. A length of 3m keeps most at the right distance on the runs and swims; however, experiment with your teammate to find out what works best for you. Make sure it is easy to unclip your tow as you will want to separate on some run sections.

KIT MANAGEMENT & TRANSITIONS

Smooth, well-drilled transitions are essential for a good performance on race day and a big part of smooth transitions involves working together. Practice getting in and out of water together (with your tow system) as much as you can. Be comfortable and well-practiced with hand paddles and pull-buoy management if you choose to use them. And learn to recognise when your partner needs help.

It is important to only race with what you have trained with. If you are not comfortable with something, don't use it on race day.

LEARN THE COURSE

Knowing the length of each leg will help determine your pacing, wetsuit and nutrition strategies for race day. If you are staring down the barrel of an 8km run with ascent, you may want to pull down your wetsuit to keep cool; if it's a 1km jog until the next swim, you won't. Similarly, knowing the length of the swim you are about to undertake will help you mentally prepare for what lies ahead. Knowing what's coming up will help you work better as a team. For example, does your partner may need help with a zip or some nutrition? Do you need to ease off or can you blast the next section?

At its best, swimrun takes you and your race partner on a challenging, adventurous journey through the natural environment. Swimrun makes me happy, but it's more than twice as good when it's shared 🍷

Mike Alexander is one of the most experienced swimrun athletes in the UK, competing in male and mixed category races across Europe including the Otilio World Series, the BRECA UK Championships & the LoveSwimRun Series. He is an experienced Level 2 Open Water Coach and Mountain Leader. He is passionate about swimrun and loves sharing what he has learnt. Find out more: www.weswimrun.org/workshop



Ötillö Swimrun Malta

Simon Griffiths took on the first edition of the latest addition to the Ötillö World Championship series

The organisers warned us Swimrun Malta would be tough, that it featured difficult technical trails and challenging swims, and included "some surprises". They weren't joking.

Ötillö is guided by the principles that participants should "experience nature in the purest possible way", they should respect the environment and should expect to challenge both their physical and mental endurance. They're serious about this, too.

We were perhaps unlucky with the weather. Malta was battered by storms and strong winds on the day of the race. Parts of the course that would have been challenging in good conditions became extreme. On the other hand, there was little risk of





Tricky swim exits are part of the swimrun experience



DON'T BE FOOLED

The first part of the race is through urban areas, so some of the running was on roads and pavements. But don't be fooled; the organisers also found us steep steps to climb, slippery rocks to bound across and a boulder strewn beach to pick our way through. It all added to the sense of adventure and challenge.

The early swims were relatively short and straightforward. The sea was choppy but the water was clear and warm (in fact, we got chilled on the runs from the wind and rain and actually warmed up in the water!).

The fifth swim, at 1600m around a headland, was the longest but didn't present any problems apart from a tricky exit over moss-covered rocks. However, from this point on, each swim became a little rougher than the previous one. One 1400m swim took us a painfully long 30 minutes to complete due to the battering we got from the waves.

As we approached the rugged northern end of the island, the runs became more technical. In exchange, we were rewarded by spectacular views, when we dared look up to appreciate them. We had sharp rocks, loose stones, wet mud, sticky clay and

soft sand to contend with. Flat sections where we could actually run were few and far between. Mostly, we scrambled, stumbled, bottom-slid and crawled. The elite athletes at the front must have had the agility of mountain goats to cover the ground as fast as they did.

Unfortunately (at least from our perspective) a couple of the swims had to be cancelled in the most exposed stretches as the entry and exit points had become too dangerous. That meant extra running. Luckily, we could still do the final swim to the finish line at Golden Bay Beach, which was

the best yet with beautiful big waves to carry us to the shore. Out of the 202 teams that started, we were the 83rd to get there. Despite our lowly position, we were delighted to make it. Almost one in five of the teams on the start line didn't make the cut-offs or withdrew. For us, this event was definitely in the "challenge" rather than "race" category.

DESIGNED TO BE TOUGH

I fear I may have made Swimrun Malta sound like a bad experience. It wasn't. I had a fabulous and memorable day. Ötillö World Series events are designed to be tough. There is an expectation that you will have done the necessary training and preparation, and that you take responsibility for your own safety and that of your race partner. If you saw another team in difficulties, you would help them, and they would do the same for you. You should not undertake a World Series event lightly. But if you enter, you'll be rewarded with a unique challenge and a fantastic experience that you'll almost certainly want to repeat.

For swimmers, Malta is a great choice as it has a high proportion of swimming, but please make sure you can run trails too! If the full distance sounds too daunting, there are shorter "sprint" and "experience" events instead 🏊

FLAT SECTIONS WHERE WE COULD ACTUALLY RUN WERE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN

over-heating.

We started in the rain, at eight in the morning, above Valetta's incredible rampart walls. The pace through the historic town was quick, despite the slippery cobbles. With 30km of running ahead of us, it wasn't a pace we were able to match, and my race partner and I soon found ourselves near the back, despite running at a speed of about 4:30 minutes per km. We hoped, being better swimmers than runners, that we'd make up places in the swims. We didn't. The level of competition was clearly higher than in the swimruns we'd done previously.

Race details

Event name: Ötillö Swimrun Malta

Distances: Run 30.9km, swim 8.7km*

Water type: sea

Wetsuit policy: compulsory if water below 19 degrees

Water temperature: 20 degrees in 2019

Find out more:

otilloswimrun.com/races/malta/

Watch the event video here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rx4jimocF10&feature=youtu.be