

Better together



Happiness is only real when shared
Chris McCandless



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 paddles. 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.



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

