

BIG GROUPTTEST

# WETSUITS

Here's the big daddy of grouptests – the tri-specific wetsuit – with 14 aquatic assets put under Matt Baird and Jack Sexty's microscope...

## JARGON BUSTER

**TOP-DOWN ZIPPER**  
An inverted wetsuit zip that closes from the top down (neck to waist) to prevent any swimmers behind or beside you 'accidentally' pulling it open to ruin your swim.

**BREAKAWAY ZIPPER**  
Zips that split apart fully at once rather than having to be undone, in order to allow faster wetsuit removal.

**YAMAMOTO**  
The Japanese brand who supply much of the neoprene for the wetsuits on test, with their S.C.S (Super Composite Skin) coating also applied to many suits.

**T1**  
The first transition on triathlon race day, from swim to bike.

**CUFFS OR PANELS**  
A number of the suits here have forearm cuffs or catch panels, which either aim to increase feel for the water or improve the catch.

**NEOPRENE DEPTH**  
Wetsuits are constructed with different thicknesses of neoprene to aid flexibility and improve buoyancy.

**NECK SEAL**  
The seal should be tight enough to stop water seeping in. But make sure it isn't too restrictive around the neck and that there's no danger of chafing.



**Y**es, you're only in the thing for about 10% of your race, but a tri-specific wetsuit is one of the sport's big ticket items with the ability to make or break your race. An ill-fitting, poorly-chosen suit will leave you sinking in the aqua, and with a redder neck than Cleetus from *The Simpsons*.

When it comes to buying your triathlon wetsuit, our well-worn mantra is 'try before you buy'; humans come in more than S, M, ML, L and XL sizes so naturally many wetsuits won't fit your own body shape. Comfort is key so, if possible, find a tri retailer or wetsuit expo to try – or even better test in open water – the suits. If not, ensure the online seller has a decent returns policy, as you could be making a number of trips to the post office.

Also keep your own swim ability to the forefront of your mind when picking. Be aware that a top-end suit is for top-end athletes, with many of the features – slender neoprene and a reduction in buoyancy – lost on, or even detrimental to, beginner swimmers. Those with sinking bums and legs should look for increased neoprene thickness and thus enhanced buoyancy in the legs, while you swift human fishes should focus further on flexibility and the hydrodynamics provided.

This year, we have two testers for the main price ranges. Matt, our features ed, is your entry to mid-level guide, while Jack, our swift staff writer, takes on the higher priced suits. Both will be looking at fit, flexibility, water ingress, comfort, chafing (or lack of) and how easy it is to remove the suit.

Matt will be giving a closer examination to buoyancy for sinking bodies, while Jack will be weighing up the auxiliary features such as catch panels and reverse zippers, plus how fast the suit feels in the water. So, without further ado, here's the class of 2016 rated and reviewed...

*While many of these suits come in women's cuts, fear ye not ladies there'll be a women-specific wetsuit grouptest next issue, with eight suits on test for every budget.*

## HOW WE TESTED

We were lucky this year to raid our publisher's piggy bank and test these suits in the warm(er) Atlantic waters of the Canaries, namely the splendid Las Playitas Resort in Fuerteventura. This afforded us the opportunity to test them in something approaching UK summer seawater temperatures, dealing with waves and currents to fully judge their race-day prowess (and water ingress). Each was tested for fit, performance, hydrodynamics, buoyancy, comfort, added features, durability, zipper quality, ease and speed of removal, budget and, finally, aesthetics.

IMAGES THESECRETSTUDIO.NET  
WORDS MATT BAIRD AND JACK SEXTY



**LOMO CHALLENGER**  
£109.00 [www.ewetsuits.com](http://www.ewetsuits.com)

Out of the box and the Challenger seems a touch agricultural, feeling heavy and featuring few visual flourishes. So is it a false economy or a fish through the water? Into the Atlantic and it's certainly warm (Lomo hail from Scotland, after all), although there was a little chilly water ingress around the neck and sleeves when the conditions became rough. In terms of buoyancy, the sizeable 5mm Matsuda neoprene body and bottom thickness felt like it would've kept Iron Man afloat, let alone an Ironman athlete, but the surprise here was the generous flexibility provided by the 1.5mm underarm panels, something we factored wouldn't exist at this price. It was easy to get out of and chafe-free, although not much fun to run in if you have long transitions.

**» VERDICT** ●●●●●●●●○○ **78%**  
Huge buoyancy and warmth, and surprisingly flexible for the price, too

**ZONE3 ADVANCE**  
£159.00 [www.racezone3.com](http://www.racezone3.com)

We tested these suits in ascending price order and however much the Lomo impressed, the latest Advance from Zone3 blew it out of the water. Visually and in terms of ingredients, it's an instant step-up, with Zone3's 'Pro-Speed' cuffs for easy removal and 'Speedflo' fabric that reduced drag in the water. Despite a low-ish cut neckline, there was minimal water ingress throughout and, thanks to the neck guard, there was no neck chafing. Unlike Lomo, the well-crafted blend of 3mm and 4mm neoprene on the torso - plus 4mm on the legs - provided a decent amount of buoyancy, while the 2mm underarm thickness ensured a range of arm movements. Quite how they've done it for £159 we're not sure, but the Advance punches above releases twice its price.

**» VERDICT** ●●●●●●●●●●○ **95%**  
Quite simply, a stunning suit with great features that's an absolute steal for £159

**ZOGGS FX3**  
£165.00 [www.zoggs.com](http://www.zoggs.com)

Zoggs may be a familiar sight in the world of swimming, but are only just beginning to make in-roads in the tri-specific wetsuit market. The FX3 is their entry-level - and surprisingly lightweight - offering. The arm design may be loud but the FX3 quietly goes about its business, with little in the way of extras and the 3mm panel on the chest providing adequate upper-body buoyancy. The Yamamoto 4mm hips and legs thickness provides plenty of lower-body lift, while the 1.5/2mm mix on the arms is impressively supple. The use of Yamamoto's S.C.S materials adds a level of warmth and strength, yet compared to the 2mm neck thickness provided by Blueseventy right, the neck's 4mm neoprene feels restrictive and left us sore after longer than a 1km stretch.

**» VERDICT** ●●●●●●●●○○○ **84%**  
Well-priced and crafted release for beginner athletes, but check the neck

**BLUESEVENTY FUSION**  
£245.00 [www.blueseventy.co.uk](http://www.blueseventy.co.uk)

Pay over £200 and more features trickle into play, with the Fusion boasting Yamamoto's S.C.S coating on the legs for added durability and warmth, and honeycomb arm cuffs for improved crawl feel. The 1.5mm arms were among the best here for arm movement, while the visuals looked fantastic pulling through the Atlantic waters. Blueseventy tout the thin 2mm neckline and 'lowered collar' and, while it's certainly supple, we still felt it was a little tight. In terms of buoyancy, the 3mm upper and 5mm legs combo is the winning mix for most swimmers, and the Fusion delivers the optimum amount of chest and leg lift. While their step away from the tri-suit market is a surprise, the Fusion is continued proof that the Kiwis are one of the masters of wetsuit design.

**» VERDICT** ●●●●●●●●●●○ **93%**  
A stylish, supple and top-draw package, and at a wallet-friendly price, too



## £100-300 VERDICT

Which sub-£300 suit is top of the class in this split test? Let the neoprene showdown commence!



**DESPITE STARTING AT** £109, there are no stinkers here. Construction is universally good and much multisport nous has gone into the creation of this mostly magnificent seven.

**WE TESTED THE** Lomo first and it was impressively flexible around the shoulders while offering huge body lift to those completely new to tri. It's only when we tested the other suits that its mass of neoprene felt unrefined. Yet, given it costs about £100 to hire a suit for a season, we'd have no qualms recommending this to triathletes, even if Lomo's direct-selling ethos falls short of our 'try before you buy' mantra.

**WE'LL COME ONTO** the Zone3 and Blueseventy suits later, but the Zoggs is a decent, uncomplicated entry for a brand not famous for their tri-specificity. The FX3 upped the arm flexibility stakes and offered a smart choice of neoprene thickness throughout.

**THE £250 EUROPEAN** head-to-head between Z3r0d and Sailfish is just edged by the Germans, but sinking swimmers could do far worse than opt for the bumper buoyancy of the Z3r0d. The Zoot, meanwhile, tops the price list, but it's also the fastest through the water, while still providing buoyancy and comfort. Intermediate swimmers could do far worse.

**SO THE ENTRY/MID-LEVEL** shootout comes down to Zone3 and Blueseventy, with the latter boasting the smartest visuals, superior flexibility and the optimum blend of neoprene thickness and buoyancy. But it's the Brits Zone3 who take this spread's Best on Test gong, with extra features like the neck guard and easy removal cuffs adding to an already impressive package. And for £159, it's one of the greatest bargains we've featured for a very long time.

### Z3R0D ATLANTE £259.00 [www.z3r0d.com](http://www.z3r0d.com)

Unlike their ultra tight tri-suits that we've long battled to get into, the Atlante from French brand Z3r0d is easy to slip on, proving the biggest on test in terms of leg and arm length. Despite their Mediterranean base, the suit is certainly thick and provides plenty of warmth, with the 5mm panels on the chest providing huge body uplift, excessively in our eyes. Positively, the brand's S.S.S (not S.C.S) coating is slippery through the water and their 'Wrist 2 Wrist' panel and 1.5mm shoulder thickness provided some great upper-arm mobility. And while it's refreshing to see more colour - the suit looks like something Deadpool would wear - the red arms become slippery when wet and we somehow managed to bat ourselves in the face when taking it off at speed.

**» VERDICT**  ●●●●●●●●○○○ **74%**  
Buoyant, roomy and visually different, but outgunned by suits elsewhere

### SAILFISH VIBRANT £269.00 [www.sailfish.com](http://www.sailfish.com)

Although not common at UK races, Sailfish are huge in their Germanic homeland. Wheeling out the stereotypes, the Vibrant is an efficient number. Although Sailfish's lowest-priced offering, the 3/4mm leg thickness appeals more to intermediate swimmers with an efficient kick, with much of the buoyancy provided by the 4mm chest. For us, the neckline was too restrictive (minimising water ingress shouldn't come at the expense of comfort) yet the 1.5mm underarm thickness is impressive in terms of flexibility (it's actually a little too loose under the arms). The £269 price sees the appearance of 'stability' panels, yet we felt no difference from those sans panels. Elsewhere, removal is easy and the design could grace a top-end suit.

**» VERDICT**  ●●●●●●●●○○○ **77%**  
Better for the strong leg kickers out there, but we have neck misgivings

### ZOOT Z FORCE 3 £270.00 [www.zootsports.com](http://www.zootsports.com)

Zoot's tri history goes back decades, and the Z Force 3 instantly feels an assured and lightweight package. It took us longer to get the suit on, but it was worth the wait; the shoulder flexibility is up there with the best on this spread, and the low profile neck line was unrestrictive yet still minimised water ingress. The extra spend witnesses a grooved chest panel for improved lung expansion, while the S.C.S coating felt fast through the water, which is something suits with this price tag need to start justifying. The myriad of 3/4/5mm thickness panels provided impressive buoyancy in the legs, back and bottom, with the front panel offering core support too. A durability concern came in the finishing of the neck, which wasn't bonded like the rest here.

**» VERDICT**  ●●●●●●●●○○○ **82%**  
Fast and flexible, with the grooved chest panel a welcome and fast addition



**AQUA SPHERE  
RACER**  
£369.99 [aquasphereswim.com/uk](http://aquasphereswim.com/uk)

The Aqua Sphere Racer is the most affordable of the mid-to-high-end suits, and we also think it's the best looking here. The suit is made with Yamamoto 39 neoprene, a slightly less flexible build than the majority here made with 40, but as long as you get the right size it shouldn't pose performance hindrances. This means the suit is also more hard-wearing, so less likely to tear or snag. In the water, we were happy with the flexibility and the suit provided a comfortable swim. Though our test suit was on the smaller side for our awkwardly sized reviewer it came off quite quickly, with the quick-release ankle 'transition panels' coming in handy. If you don't want your wetsuit spend to push into the £400 bracket, you can't go far wrong with the Racer.

**» VERDICT**  
●●●●●●●●●○ **84%**  
Looks good, swims impressively and provides good value to boot

**SPEEDO  
ELITE**  
£390.00 [www.speedstore.co.uk](http://www.speedstore.co.uk)

The Speedo Elite immediately struck us as having a slightly strange shape, with the thigh sections almost crossing over at the join and looking as though they're far too wide. While swimming, the suit did feel like it sagged a bit between the legs, but elsewhere the suit generally fits well with good suppleness around the shoulders. The 'super sealed' cuffs provide the right amount of tightness to prevent water build-up, and they weren't a pain to get on or off. There are no specific features on the forearm panels that inspire speed, and they're not the most flexible on test. A reverse zipper makes for a quick release but, due to the unusual shape, we found it slightly more of a struggle to get off than some of the more supple suits on test.

**» VERDICT**  
●●●●●●●●●○ **75%**  
Good flexibility but we weren't blown away by the shape

**YONDA  
GHOST**  
£399.99 [www.yondasports.com](http://www.yondasports.com)

Yonda is a fledgling British brand co-founded by elite triathlete Mark Buckingham, and the Ghost is their only wetsuit currently available. Admittedly there's nothing revolutionary in the Ghost that you won't find in other high-end suits in terms of engineering and buoyancy, and not being specifically aimed at the sinky-legged it might be favoured by stronger swimmers. We felt we could utilise a strong pull through the forearm section due to the super-thin Lycra material, and we experienced no discomfort around the neck over our test swims. One huge plus is how fast it came off in 10secs flat. The Aerious just comes out on top at this price point, but some intermediate to advanced swimmers may still prefer the Ghost due to the flexibility.

**» VERDICT**  
●●●●●●●●●○ **86%**  
Very flexible and good all-rounder from the new kids on the wetsuit block

**HUUB  
AERIOUS 2**  
£399.99 [www.huubdesign.com](http://www.huubdesign.com)

Sitting below the Archimedes 2 in Huub's 2016 range, the Aerious 2 offers better value with few trade-offs for most triathletes. It's targeted at sinky-legged swimmers so, although those with a club-swimming background might be better going for the 4:4 buoyancy on the Archimedes, 'the 85%' of triathletes, as Huub call them, will find the 3:5 buoyancy ratio more useful to correct sinky legs. The chest area isn't at all restrictive despite the 3mm buoyancy and, although the forearm sections aren't the thinnest, they didn't feel heavy. It also came off rapidly, taking barely 10secs. It's noticeable how many athletes these days sport Huub suits, and with good reason - the Aerious is simply an excellent wetsuit, and hard to rival in its price bracket.

**» VERDICT**  
●●●●●●●●●○ **92%**  
A great suit that'll cater for most triathletes looking to upgrade



## TOP-END VERDICT

Speed is a key factor in the £300+ price point, so which of these takes the top-draw group test honours?

**OUR MID-TO** high-end test featured suits that were all either top-of-the-range or a step down. Top-end wetsuits typically have a thinner grade of neoprene in the torso, shoulders and arms, which allow for a more unrestricted swim. Although recently it's become more common for triathletes without a swim background to seek every advantage. This gap in the market has been exploited by brands such as Huub and Orca, who offer premium suits with maximum buoyancy in the hips and legs to correct body position.

**OF THE HUUB** Aerioux 2 and Orca 3.8 the Aerioux wins, providing great buoyancy and no restriction in the upper body to make it suitable for a wide range of swimmers. We liked Orca's offering, but its market may be smaller due to the huge buoyancy ratio.

**OF THE OUT-AND-OUT** pro offerings we'd be inclined to go with Yonda, a new British brand who've created a quality and stylish suit at a relatively sensible price point. The Roka Maverick is on par, if not better performance-wise, but it's pricey and it rubbed.

**2XU'S IGNITION FRUSTRATED** us, as we didn't feel performance benefits from the solid forearm panels and suspected they may be hindering our pull if anything. The Speedo Elite didn't blow us away, with a slightly unusual build in the upper leg area.

**OVERALL THE AERIOUX 2** is our favourite and, although it's not top of Huub's line, we'd suggest for most swimmers it's a better deal than their Archimedes 2 with few trade-offs. Yonda and Aqua Sphere get honourable mentions, and there's actually no suit here we'd avoid on race day.

### 2XU IGNITION £450.00 [www.2xu.com/uk](http://www.2xu.com/uk)

2XU have revamped their range entirely for 2016, and the Ignition is one beneath their top-end suit in terms of price-point. Design-wise it looks similar to 2015's V:3, with the 'velocity strakes' on the front and branding on the hips and shoulder sections. We noticed over a long swim that the neck lining is more comfortable than with previous 2XU suits we've tested, which tended to rub. The roll bar on the core isn't better or worse than other suits for core support, but the thermal lining on the chest and back is useful for cold-water swims. Other areas we weren't so impressed with though - the huge catch panels on the arms actually hindered our pull and, although it's a feature 2XU widely promote, we think it's time to consign this piece of tech to history.

**» VERDICT**  
 **69%**  
 Improved comfort and warmth, but we didn't like the forearm panels

### ORCA 3.8 £425.00 [www.orca.com/gb](http://www.orca.com/gb)

Touted as Orca's most buoyant suit, the 3.8 is a beast compared to some of the thinner options here. Orca's policy of offering high-end suits to the less able swimmer makes sense in theory, as there tends to be more strong bike/runner age-groupers who want every advantage. The Predator at the top of Orca's range is almost £600, so the 3.8 certainly provides better value with the only trade-off being slightly less flexibility in the arms. We feel the buoyancy ratio may be excessive if the long-term goal is to improve your technique, therefore the 3.8 could end up as a short-term fix for a fast improving swimmer. That said, the shoulders use 40cell Yamamoto neoprene like many performance suits at this price-point, making for a pleasant and unrestricted swim.

**» VERDICT**  
 **82%**  
 Reliable and more affordable than Orca's top-end max buoyancy suit

### ROKA MAVERICK PRO £570.00 [www.rokasports.com](http://www.rokasports.com)

The Maverick Pro is the neoprene of choice for ITU world champs Javier Gomez and Gwen Jorgensen. A fine endorsement, but enough to shell out nearly £600 for a wetsuit? Well, it certainly feels luxurious, without being so flimsy you're afraid of tears. With a 1.5mm/3mm/5mm buoyancy profile we love the flexibility around the chest area, and the freedom of movement is excellent in the arms. We did notice some neck rub over a long swim (something we wouldn't expect at this price point), so apply some lube before swimming. The material construction of the Maverick Pro is second-to-none, and if you have the cash you won't be disappointed, but there are less expensive suits out there with similar benefits in terms of the buoyancy ratio.

**» VERDICT**  
 **78%**  
 Big ticket price with performance to match, but lacking neck comfort

