

# THE NEWBIE

*Jason Johnson is the editor of Los Angeles Sports & Fitness Magazine and has never competed in a triathlon, or a cycling or swimming event for that matter.*

I doubt that I will blaze through the City of Los Angeles Triathlon in September, but I do expect to finish strong and am happy to say that I am no longer nervous about the event.

I've been through a lot in the last few months — June was my busiest month yet — and it's made me realize that I, too, can be a triathlete. I added swimming to my routine and started going on some longer rides. In fact, I have completed more than the course distance for each leg already in single training sessions, although I haven't combined all three into one workout yet.

I also did my first triathlon (on a relay team) and have put in a handful of brick workouts, which include at least two consecutive disciplines.

The most relevant workout I've had so far came in early July. I went out to the official training series for the L.A. Triathlon — Playa del Run (playadelrun.com) in Playa del Rey. The 10-week, Thursday evening series runs through August 14 and includes a 1K swim followed by a 5K run. It's worth trying since you can combine the disciplines or choose just one to suit your workout needs. I did the combo, getting in my first ocean swim followed by a steady run along the strand.

I went mainly to swim, and with nearly 90 swimmers taking part, I got a great taste of a swim start. I also tried out my wetsuit — the new Aqua Sphere Swim Skin (aquasphereusa.com). It doesn't provide as much buoyancy as most tri wetsuits since it is half the weight, but its material — a combination of Lycra, Teflon and Neoprene — allowed for great range of motion, and it kept me warm.

As I expected, I came in toward the back of the pack. That was fine because my goal this time was just to finish.

Swimming in the ocean was completely different than the pool training I have been doing at Daland Swim School in Thousand Oaks (dalandswim.com). I decided to try this pool because I had heard that its masters program — Daland Masters — was a good one for training. Run by Peter Daland, who coached two Olympic teams and led USC to nine NCAA team championships in his 35 years there, the Masters program is one of the best in Southern California.

I watched an evening workout and was blown away by the intensity. I realized right away that the program was too advanced for me at this point, so I have been swimming on my own at the facility, owned by Daland's wife, Ingrid, and have been improving with every workout. Swimming was very challenging at first, but my endurance has improved and I am really enjoying it.

I also do most of my biking in the Conejo Valley area, which is a great place to train because of all the hills. At the end of June, I got my first taste of difficult hill training on a 30-mile Saturday morning

ride with the Sundance Cycles group in Agoura Hills.

I decided to get out with the pack for my second group ride — the first, about half as long, was with the popular Conejo Valley Cyclists. It was a challenge to keep up with such experienced riders on the Sundance ride. I got a few tips including braking and drafting techniques, but I mainly learned that I have plenty of room for improvement. We did a nice climb on Mulholland Drive, followed by an extremely difficult one over Kanan Road that wore me out. I did slow the group down a bit, but they didn't seem to care since they were happy to see a beginner taking the next step.



**FIRST RACE:** I got a great taste of the sport when I did the Breath of Life Triathlon relay.

A week before the Sundance ride, I did my first race. I teamed up with my publisher and another triathlete to compete in the Breath of Life Triathlon (triforlife.com), a festive, family-oriented event in Ventura. With 250 solo competitors and 30 relay teams, the event raised money for the Dina LaVigna Breath of Life Fund, which helps improve the quality of life of Primary Immunodeficiency (PI) patients at local hospitals.

I did the 40K bike leg through the flatlands of Ventura and felt great afterward. In fact, I could have pushed myself a little harder. But I guess it was better to be safe than sorry in my first race.

Besides building my endurance through swimming, cycling and running workouts, I also had the opportunity to get some expert advice at the Phase IV endurance training facility in Santa Monica (forsterpt.com). I learned so much in one day at the all-around performance center for endurance athletes.

I met with owner Robert Forster, who has practiced sports physical therapy in Santa Monica for more than 20 years, and he put me through a structural exam to predict where I may encounter some problems. Then Nate Loyal, a local cyclist who rides on the Helen's Cycles team, did a complete bike fit on my Giant TCR Aero2. He adjusted the bike so much that it felt like a new bike — even my muscles had to adapt. But I'm much more comfortable now, and Loyal even gave me some advice on training and pedal stroke technique. Anyone who is looking to get the most out of their body and their bike would benefit from a professional bike fit.

After my bike fit, Carlyn Challgren, an adventure racer and triathlete, took me through an individualized stretching and strengthening program to help prepare my muscles and joints for the training ahead. She helped me target muscles I don't think I've ever stretched before. I like to think of the program as the fourth dimension to my training, because without it my body would be more prone to injuries.

The Phase IV experience is great for the beginner because you can take in everything and really learn from the experts, but I believe the facility is even better for the advanced athlete who is looking to reach that next level.

I realize that training for a triathlon is draining; sometimes I even ask myself why I got myself into this. But I do feel better physically and mentally, and I love how I feel after a great workout. <<