

Goggles and the End of Stinging Eyes



International Swimming Hall of Fame

>When USMS member Mel Goldstein swam for Doc Councilman's Indiana University team in 1956-58, swim goggles were not standard issue. Actually, they hadn't been invented. "After practice it took about an hour before I could start studying because of the chlorine effect on my eyes. I used Visine by the truckload to help wash away the chlorine sting," recalls Goldstein, coach for the YMCA Indy SwimFit Masters program in Indianapolis.

But across the Pacific in Melbourne, Australia, an inventor was hard at work on behalf of bleary-eyed swimmers. Designer and master toolmaker Gordon Rattray put his mind to the problem and produced the prototype for the first small swim goggle. The Eycline company was born and, in 1963, produced the first injection-molded polycarbonate swim goggle. "He's the father of the modern goggle," says Trevor Bushell, Rattray's partner in Eycline. Rattray is now semi-retired, but his designs have set many benchmarks and launched an industry. Today, Eycline continues

to manufacture goggles and offers more than 50 models.

"Gordon was the first person to use polycarbonate, the first person to put a seal on a goggle and the first to design a slotted nosepiece," says Bushell. What are seen as standard features on modern-day swim goggles originated from that early Eycline design team, Bushell notes.

Still, it took a few years to market the product worldwide. Dianne Rothhammer, president of Aquatics by Sprint (Rothhammer International Inc.), recalls the excitement she felt when she first saw the small goggle while chaperoning the Santa Clara Swim Team at the Dallas Sprint Nationals in 1972. "During practice I was up in the stands when I saw two men talking. I told the other chaperone that I needed to know what they were talking about," she remembers. Turns out that the men were representatives of a Canadian company distributing a goggle made in Australia by Gordon Rattray.

"They showed me this goggle, and I knew that swimmers needed something like that,"



KEENA ROTHHAMMER ZOROVICH, a 1972 Olympian, was among the first to wear swim goggles, distributed initially in the U.S. by her mother's company.

says Rothhammer. "My daughter, Keena, was having vision trouble with the eye she always held open. Because Keena was just beginning to get good, they gave me 500 goggles to start selling in the USA."

And sell they did. Small goggles quickly became the rage worldwide, becoming standard equipment in competitive swimming by the 1976 Olympics. Instead of having eyes half-shut, swimmers took to the water with eyes wide open and the finish line before them. <<<

GAGA OVER GOGGLES

Once the basic concept for swimming goggles hit the market in the 1960s, more companies and more innovations could only follow.

>>> Aquatics by Sprint (Rothhammer International Inc.) becomes the first goggle supplier in the U.S. in 1972. The company founder's daughter, Keena Rothhammer, a 1972 Olympic gold and bronze medalist in the 800 and 200 freestyle, was among the first to try the new goggles.

>>> Gulbenkian Swim begins making the original Swedish goggle in 1973, featuring low-profile lenses without gaskets. Swimmers assemble the goggles themselves.

>>> Portland, Ore., dentist and swimmer John Runckel invents the Barracuda Positive Pressure swim goggle in 1979, a larger-style goggle designed to fit on the bone structure of the eye instead of inside the socket. "Barracuda is designed for comfort and to be less invasive on the tissues that surround the eyes," explains Rick Runckel, who started Barracuda's parent company, Skyline Northwest, with his father in 1977. A crown and bridge specialist, the senior Runckel reasoned that if positive pressure could be created on the jawbone to create a comfortable dental bridge, it could be developed for the eye socket. He took many impressions of different eye sockets and came up with an overall shape that fitted a large cross section of eye shapes. "The goggles are larger, but to date, I have seen no data that show they cause any more drag than any other swim goggle," says Rick Runckel.

>>> Prescription goggles, anti-fog goggles and sun-reflecting goggles roll out in the 1980s and 1990s.

>>> TYR introduces the first swim goggle designed specifically for women, the Femme T-72, which is nominated for a Manufacturers Innovation Award in 1992.

Sources: Rick Runckel, Skyline Northwest; Dianne Rothhammer, Aquatics by Sprint; TYR