Paddles, Paddles, Paddles
Our product testers had fun with this round of product testing. The paddles were carted around to several pools in a large laundry basket every day during the testing period. Several coaches were kind enough to write some distance sets that enabled the testing of different paddles for comparison.

We split the paddles into two categories: 1) Flat and 2) Curved/Specialty. Testers tried all the paddles in freestyle, backstroke, and breaststroke, with the exception of the Finis Freestyler, which is designed for freestyle only. No paddles were tested for butterfly, as none of the Masters swimmers in our testing pool use paddles for that stroke.
Flat Paddles

1. **NIKE HAND PADDLE** $14.99
   These basic flat paddles did the job, but had some features our testers were not used to. The stiff thumb loop did not seem to have a function in holding the thumb in place, and served no obvious purpose. Several testers said they would cut off the thumb loop if they purchased this paddle. There is a handy little recessed area for the thumb, which did more for thumb placement than the loop. The thumb indentation helped stabilize the paddle in freestyle and backstroke. The other feature testers noted was the lack of holes on the wings, which made the paddle waver a bit in the water, although these paddles are lightweight and flexible, making them easy to use. The paddle felt good for backstroke, but not for breaststroke. One size. allamericanswim.com.

2. **SPEEDO POWER PADDLE** $19.99
   Most testers like the stiffness and the power that these aptly named paddles afforded in freestyle. They also performed well for backstroke, but most testers felt that they wanted to go down a size when pulling backstroke. Not as flexible as some other paddles, breaststrokers felt like they wavered and were hard to control during breaststroke pulling. Most testers did not care for the unusual hand strap as shown and traded it out for the simple, flat rubber finger and wrist strips that were included in the bag. Several testers stated their preference for paddles with round surgical tubing, which makes donning and ditching them easier. Four sizes. speedousa.com.

3. **CLUBSWIM POWER SWIM PADDLE** $12.95
   These paddles are very similar to the Speedo Power Paddles, with fewer holes and a raised nodule on the palm area of the paddle. Testers liked them for the same application as the Speedo paddles: good power on freestyle, a little too large for backstroke (unless sizing down), too much wavering on breaststroke. Testers really liked the raised nodule for palm support; it felt good and did not interfere with pulling action. Three sizes. swimoutlet.com.

4. **SPEEDO TRAINING PADDLE** $12.99
   These classic paddles hearken back to the 1970s and are based on Coach Jim Montrella's patented design (see Splashback, page 50) Nostalgia aside, we could not find anyone that liked swimming with them, citing wobbling and inversion. Innovation and increases in knowledge have advanced paddle quality and Speedo’s other models, as well as other brands here on these pages, make these seem a bit antiquated. Five sizes. speedousa.com.

5. **STROKEMAKERS SWIMMING TRAINING PADDLE** $12.95 - $18.95
   The Strokemakers were some of the most popular paddles we tested. Testers liked the array of sizes. They commented that the lightweight design and flexibility allowed them to feel the water, yet find enough power. As with other paddles, testers utilized different sizes for different strokes or drills. The larger paddles were great for freestyle and breaststroke and most testers preferred a size smaller for backstroke. Seven sizes. strokemakers.com.

6. **SWIMPADDLES.COM MOON PADDLE** $13.95
   Another popular paddle, these are similar to the Strokemakers in lightness and flexibility, with a slightly different, cutaway shape. Many testers felt that the medium was an excellent size for a paddle, one noting a “perfect hand-to-paddle ratio. I didn’t feel like I could overcompensate by bullying my way through the water.” Other testers noted that the medium size was easy on the shoulders and allowed the natural hand motions during swimming and streamlining off the wall to occur as though they were not wearing any paddle. Three sizes. swimpaddles.com.

7. **SWIMPADDLES.COM STAR PADDLE** $14.95
   These were a surprise hit. Almost everyone loved them. No one could figure out the strange shape or the purpose of the “wings” on the side, but they felt so good in the water that no one cared. Testers felt the paddles stiff enough for a good workout and a firm catch, but flexible enough to feel the water throughout the stroke. Several testers with prior shoulder issues were pleasantly surprised at the lack of shoulder strain with this paddle. The Star Paddles felt good for all three strokes, allowing testers to feel their catch, get power and lift, and move naturally. Many testers felt that if they could only have one set of paddles, it would be the Star Paddles. One size. swimpaddles.com.
continued from Flat Paddles

8. TYR CATALYST BRITE $17.00
Testers were a little surprised initially with the big red lobster claw appearance of these paddles, but once they used them, gave them positive reviews overall. The cutout in the center provided water flow-through, which testers liked for feeling the water and a lessening of strain on the shoulders. Although oversized, testers felt this paddle afforded both flexibility and resistance, allowing for feel and power, without excess strain on the shoulders and biceps. Some testers felt they needed a size smaller to be safe with their shoulders. Most testers found a lot of power in longer freestyle sets with this paddle, as well as good lift in breaststroke. The variety of hand strap positions and large round rubber tubing made this paddle comfortable for everyone. Six sizes. tyr.com.

9. WATER GEAR STROKE MASTERS $12.99
These paddles were surprisingly well received. The toy colors and flat rubber band-like hand straps made them seem less serious but, once put to the test, they performed well. They were not very powerful, but allowed for a good catch and feel. These paddles are slightly curved at the palm, which made them comfortable. They were not curved enough to adversely effect the catch in freestyle and backstroke, but the breaststrokers did not like the recovery with these paddles. The strap configuration was seen favorably and although testers overall prefer round tubing to flat straps, these still were easy to put on and take off and remained secure while swimming. Consensus among testers was this is a great paddle if you are not looking for a lot of power or if you are just venturing into paddle drills. Three sizes. watergear.com.

Curved/Specialty Paddles

1. BARRACUDA HAND PADDLES $10.50
Like all the curved paddles tested, these were very comfortable but were deemed ineffective for pulling freestyle or breaststroke – doing well only for backstroke. For freestyle, most comments were about the catch, and how the curved paddle eliminated or made the swimmers’ catch feel spongy. Some said the paddle dove, causing them to bend their wrists – a big no-no in freestyle. The breaststrokers disliked the recovery portion of the stroke, as the curved paddle caused too much resistance while trying to shoot the hands forward in a fast-hands recovery. However, these paddles were a hit with the backstrokers, who felt the curved design put the hand in just the right position to push water toward the feet in the propulsive phase of the backstroke. One tester stated “I felt resistance for my forearm strength and I could feel exactly where my hands entered and left the water.” One size. skylinenw.com.

2. KIEFER ERGO PADDLES $10.95
These are identical to the Barracuda paddle, but Kiefer offers them in two sizes. As with the Barracuda, these were very comfortable – but not effective for any stroke except backstroke, in which they excelled. kiefer.com.

3. SPEEDO CONTOURED SWIM PADDLE $14.95
Like the Barracuda and Kiefer Ergo, these paddles did not fare well for freestyle or breaststroke. They performed well for backstroke. These appear to be a high quality paddle and come in several sizes, but like in Speedo’s Power Paddle, most testers did not like the flat rubber hand straps, which made them difficult to get on and off, and would swap them for tubing. Three sizes. speedousa.com.

4. KIEFER STROKE PERFECTION $6.95
These paddles did not fare well with testers. As experienced Masters swimmers, testers could not figure out the purpose of the thin and flexible blade, other than possibly for some sculling drills. They were also very small, maybe better designed for children’s hands. The finger loop was difficult to use, making the paddle hard to get on and off. kiefer.com.

5. STINGRAY SR 2000/3000 $19.95
The Stingray was one of the more unusual paddles tested. Although they were quite curved up the middle, the splaying of the curve at the top still made for a good flat catch in the freestyle pull. Testers reported excellent control and feel for the water. The curve of the paddle was...
comfortable and easy to put on and take off. These paddles had a lot of power and were fun to use. Several testers noted that they should be used with caution, as it might be easy to overdo it on the shoulders and arm muscles. Two testers scraped their thighs with the larger size, and the edges were somewhat sharp compared to other paddles. One tester reported, “They really enhanced my pull, without forcing modifications to compensate for the paddle.” Most testers agreed however, that the Stingray’s unique curved design made both backstroke and breaststroke pulling very difficult, if not impossible. Four sizes. stingraypaddles.com.

**FINIS FREESTYLER**
$17.99

These paddles are made for one specific technique drill: the lengthening of the freestyle stroke upon entry. The streamlined design and lower skeg had testers really stretching out and reaching to increase their pulls upon entry and catch. Testers who needed to work on this aspect of their freestyle got a lot of use out of these. Several testers felt that the propulsive phase of the stroke was diminished and did not like how the end of the pull felt. Inexperienced swimmers would need to control their entries as the shape of the paddle made it easy to end up with inversions toward the thumb or wrist bending. Two sizes. finis.com.