We test tech suits periodically as materials, styles and rules change, but what about training suits? We asked swimsuit manufacturers to send us their toughest polyester practice suits. Our committed product testers, who swim between 20 and 40 hours per month, started wearing them on January 1, 2012, and filled out monthly surveys through June 2012. Testers marked wear and tear for each month as follows:

- No change
- Fading
- Stretching
- Straps or string deteriorating (straps hardening, string fraying or breaking)
- Fabric deteriorating (fabric thinning or holes—even if they are near seams)
- Seams deteriorating (unraveling or splitting)

Many of the suits were still wearable after six months (all the underwater photos in this spread were taken in July 2012). Our primary purpose was to test the durability of the fabrics, straps and seams, but we made a few notes on style and fit as well.

Men reported less wear and tear than women overall; we’re guessing that’s because their suits don’t have to contend with the four-way stretching that women’s suits undergo from the straps pulling the fabric vertically over the torso.

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1. AGON | AGONSWIM.COM
   Speedline (W) $30–$44 | (M) $18–$30
   Available in women’s sizes 22–42 and men’s sizes 22–46.

Agon’s Speedline fabric suits held up extremely well. One tester who swam more than 40 hours in several test months report no change until the sixth month, and then reported only a slight stretching at the top of the suit. Another tester reported some loose seam threads during the third month of testing, which did not affect the fabric or fit. One tester did note that the elastic inside the shoulder straps hardened a little by the third month and was less flexible, but it did not affect suit performance. These suits lasted for the entire testing period, except for one exceptionally attractive brief that was stolen from the back of one tester’s pickup truck during the third month.

WANTED: One Agon brief stolen from back of pickup truck.
Agon’s Duramax fabric seemed a little more stretchy and has a matte appearance in contrast to the shiny Speedline fabric, probably because of its increased percentage (60 percent vs. Speedline’s 53 percent) of PBT (texturized polyester), but it held up nearly as well. Testers reported stretching at three months, as well as some loose stitching. Slight fading and more stretching was reported in months four and five; however, this suit held up for all six months of the testing period. Men’s suits run one or two sizes large.

2. AQUA SPHERE | AQUASPHERESWIM.COM

**Aqua Infinity (W) $60–$85 (M) $28–$55**
Available in women’s sizes 30–44 and men’s sizes 30–42.

Aqua Sphere’s Aqua Infinity fabric is comfortable. Most female testers reported fading and stretching beginning in the third month, with straps deteriorating (hardening) and fabric deteriorating (thinning or holes) in the fourth through sixth months. One tester noticed fabric deterioration during the first month. In stark contrast, another tester reported only slight fading and stretching at the five-month mark. One tester noted that the elastic around the leg openings stretched out during the third month, which allowed the suit to creep up in the back. The male testers fared better, with the fabric holding up for the entire six-month testing period. The women’s suits fit a full figure better than some other brands, and seem to be designed for better coverage all over.

3. ARENA | ARENAUSA.COM

**Waternity (W) $62–$68 (M) $36–$44**
Available in women’s and men’s sizes 30–40.

Arena’s Waternity fabric got great reviews from testers. Most of them wore the suits for the entire six-month testing period. Almost all reported that the suit liner showed signs of wear fairly quickly, usually by the second or third month, but that didn’t affect the wearability of the suits. The outer fabric retained its softness, colors and shape. One female tester reported elastic deterioration of the leg openings at the end of the third month. One male tester’s suit split at the end of the fifth month. Arena also got style points from testers for the minimalist-back Malaki for women and an attractive Bainsail square-cut brief for men.
4. BLUESENVITY | BLUESENVITY.COM

(W) $50 | (M) $25–$40
Available in women’s and men’s sizes 22–38.

The XLA fabric used for blueseventy’s practice suits held up well during the testing period for the male testers, who reported no changes until the sixth month, when the fabric started to deteriorate. The female testers reported fading and stretching beginning in the second month, and straps hardening and thinning or holes in the fabric by the third month. Several also reported that the top of the suit stretched out too quickly and scooped water. In spite of the fading and stretching, female testers liked the blueseventy’s style, including the nifty reflective patch on the back.

5. FINIS | FINISINC.COM

AquaTuff (W) $50 | (M) $28–$32
Available in women’s sizes 22–42 and men’s sizes 20–40.

Finis’s AquaTuff fabric held up well, with critical failures not reported until the fourth and fifth months for different testers. One tester reported fading right away, but noted that her pool was known for higher chlorine levels than most. Other Finis testers did not report any changes until the third month, when stretching in the seat area and fabric deterioration were reported by the women and stretching in the seams by the male testers. Several testers noted that the Finis logo wore off during the first few months. Several also noted that the stretching seemed to occur in the seams more so than in the fabric, although thinning of the fabric in the seat area was also reported. One male tester reported that the suit split in the crotch during month five.

6. KIEFER | KIEFER.COM

Aqualast (W) Flyback $30 | (M) Jammer $24 | Brief $16
Available in women’s sizes 22–44 and men’s sizes 22–38.

Because of an error on our part, we did not get a chance to test Kiefer’s Aqualast suits for longevity. We did, at the end of the testing period, receive some and they appear to be very similar to the Sporti line. They are simple, comfortable, come in basic colors and are priced for anyone’s budget. As far as sizing, they appear to run large for the women, so ordering down one size may be necessary.

7. NIKE | NIKE.COM

(W) $66 | (M) $50
Available in women’s sizes 20–40 and men’s sizes 24–38.

Nike’s 100 percent polyester is tough. Testers noted that it is less comfortable than some other brands but this didn’t bother them much unless they swam in salt water, where chafing became an issue. Slight stretching of the fabric was reported each month. The popular women’s Cut-Out tank suit has only one flaw according to testers: The thin straps stretch and then harden too quickly, causing the front to drop and scoop water. Its minimalist back design is great for avoiding unsightly tan lines, but the straps need work. The Lingerie back, a more standard back design, has thicker straps that held up better during testing.
Both of Speedo’s fabrics are seemingly indestructible. With one exception, only minimal fading and stretching was reported in either the Endurance+ or the Endurance Lite models. We assumed that the Lite models would deteriorate a lot faster than the E+ models, but both were workhorses, with only slightly more stretching reported in the Lites. Speedo’s variety of styles and patterns makes the Speedo brand a tester favorite. Unless you’re prone to misplacing your suit, Speedo’s higher price point is somewhat offset by longevity.

**Endurance+ (W) $66–$82 | (M) $43–$52**
Available in women’s sizes 26–40 and men’s sizes 22–38.

Several different models were tested in the Endurance+ fabric, including the Off-the-Grid Flyback, Mercury Splice and Super Pro. As with the Arena suits, the lining deteriorated faster than the outer suit fabric. When fading occurred, usually around month four, it was more at the seams than the fabric itself. Several testers reported some stretching beginning in months two or three, but not enough to make the suit unwearable. One female tester reported some curling of the straps in month three, but not enough to be uncomfortable or affect fit. Most men preferred the rounded drawstring to a flat one.

**Endurance Lite (W) $66–$76**
Available in women’s sizes 26–40 and men’s sizes 22–38.

Three women’s Lite models were tested, all from Speedo’s Flipturns line. The Electric Zebra Splashback has a great fit and is a nice compromise between the minimalist backs and the too-modest backs. The straps are thinner, but held up for the entire testing period. The Jive Geo Clip is a great pattern and attractive fit, but the tiny plastic clip on the back broke on the second day of testing. With the help of a seamstress, we rigged it with a rubber O-ring so we could continue to test the fabric, but that clip is a blot on an otherwise great suit. (Important: the clip renders this suit NOT legal for competition.) The Extreme Back Reversible is not meant for women requiring more upper support, and it feels strange at first (the straps ride high in the back), but like the Nike Cut-Out, is great if you swim outdoors and are trying to avoid tan lines.

**9. SPORTI | SWIMOUTLET.COM/SPORTI**
(W) $22 | (M) $12–$17
Available in women’s sizes 24–40 and men’s sizes 22–40.

Men reported very little fading or stretching of the Sporti test suits, most of which lasted for the entire six months. Slight stretching in the leg openings and fading of the seams were the only two reports for the men during the testing period, with only one suit reaching critical failure (seam split) in the fifth month. The women didn’t fare as well, with stretching reported in the second and third months. Several women doubled up and used their Sportis as drag suits when they became too stretched to wear. Several noted that the leg openings stretched too much and the suits began to ride up.
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10. TYR | TYR.COM

**Durafast (W) $50 | (M) $28–$32**

Available in sizes 20–40 for women and 22–38 for men.

For most of the testers, TYR’s Durafast fabric was as indestructible as Speedo’s and Arena’s. Most testers reported only minimal stretching and almost no fading. One female tester noted “no change” for all six months of the testing period. One male tester reported stretching during the first month and one female tester reported strap hardening, seam deterioration and stretching of the leg openings beginning in the second month, with critical failure occurring in month five. (She also noted that for several months she swam more than 40 hours per month.) One tester reported cosmetic seam and strap deterioration that did not affect the wearability of the suit. Male testers liked the larger than usual string tie, which was easy to handle and didn’t knot up.—LAURA HAMEL