Swim Bag: Tech Suits

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BY LAURA HAMEL

Spring is an ideal time to figure out what suit to wear when you step up on the blocks to put all your hard winter training to work.

As we’ve mentioned in previous tech suit reviews, high-end technical suits are built for the high-end swimmers in our sport: tall, muscular, trim. Since Masters swimmers come in all shapes and sizes, getting a proper fit can be challenging, but once you have one, you’ll notice a significant performance difference. A tech suit can hide some of the inevitable squishiness that comes with age, no matter how hard you work out, and the buoyancy and compression panels can force your body into a better position in the water.

All of this can reduce drag and help compensate for small stroke flaws, but if you haven’t put the training in, you can spend a lot of money for very little improvement. Fortunately, we always include a range of suits. So if you’re not on your game in a particular season, you can try one of the economy models and save your pennies for the latest technological textile wonder next season.

Fitting a tech suit is best accomplished by visiting a retailer practiced in fitting different body types. If you can’t attend Spring or Summer Nationals where experienced and stocked vendors have these suits on hand, and you don’t have a suit retailer in your town, then you’ll likely have to order online.

Start by figuring out how much you want to spend. Then examine the size chart of the suit you’re interested in, and take your measurements. For women, the body loop or torso measurement is important, and more manufacturers are starting to include that—FINIS has added it since we last tested suits. Speedo and TYR both offer long-torso models of their common sizes.

Finally, call your online retailer to see if they offer any fitting assistance. You can also use this review as a guide. Because our testers try on all the different suits before getting in the water, we wear good old-fashioned hip-to-toe pantyhose to make it easier. The hose allow the suits to slide on better and they ease wear and tear on the suits during the fitting phase of testing. Obviously, we do not wear the pantyhose when it’s time to go off the blocks.

Our tech suit testers are part of the fairly hard-core 5:30 a.m. training group with the Sarasota Y Sharks Masters. We caught up with them during their taper for Y Nationals for some fast and furious predawn racing.

Testing photos by Stephanie Ganey Photography
1. blueseventy nero 14 | blueseventy.com

Testers loved this suit—a clear tester favorite this time around. The nero 14 seems to have a slightly thicker fabric than the previous model, the nero XII. Testers raved about the buoyancy, compression, and overall quality. All seams are stitchless and fully bonded inside and out. In fact, we did turn this suit inside out, along with the other suits, and superior quality is evident—the bonded seams disappear even on the inside of the suit. Waist and leg openings have silicone grippers to keep the suit in place. Testers noted excellent water repellency as well. This is a first-class tech suit for the serious competitor.

**Men’s | $285**

The men’s style has a slightly lower rise than some other brands, but provided complete coverage in the back. The men’s sizing ran in line with the traditional sizing-down from practicesuit size. One male tester who wears a size 32 or 34 drag suit in practice sized-down to a size 28 in the nero 14 and reported a perfect racing fit.

**Women’s | $375**

The women’s fit was in line with traditional sizing-down—a female tester who wears a size 32 for practice fit snugly in the 26. Female testers reported a flattering fit and no water inflow at the neckline when starting from the blocks.
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2. FINIS Vapor | finisinc.com

The new Vapor is a great addition to the lineup of tech suits. Improvements from FINIS's first tech suit, the Velo, include sizing consistency and updated cuts to both men's and women's models. Testers liked the buoyancy and compression offered by the Vapor, and reported excellent water repellency. The fabric is lightweight and comfortable, but still offers good compression when fitted properly. Although we only tested the black, it appears that two cool new colors—mint and red—are also available. The Vapor is the only suit we tested that included a soft drawstring storage bag.

Men's | $349

The Vapor cut is a bit higher in the back than in the front, which took care of the water inflow problem we encountered with the low-rise back of the men's Velo in 2012. The suit runs slightly on the small side, so our tester who normally wears a size 30 tech suit found the Vapor in size 30 a tad too snug and sized up to a 32 to prevent a blowout on the blocks.

Women's | $449

FINIS has made big improvements to the size chart issues that plagued the women's Velo and added a torso loop measurement to make sizing easier. As with the men's suit, the women's model still runs a tad small in the lower half compared to other tech suits. The softer, stretchier straps can accommodate broader shoulders and back measurements; however, women with larger chests noted some exposure on the sides. Thin women with large lats and smaller chests found the best fit in the Vapor.

3. Speedo Fastskin LZR Racer Elite 2 | speedousa.com

Speedo, always out in front with design, makes a statement with the bold color-blocking design of the LZR Elite 2. Testers reported excellent compression, buoyancy, and water repellency with the Elite 2.

Men's | $285–$329

Speedo now offers a high-waisted model of this suit, a welcome change that offers more coverage, streamlining, and compression. Sizing is consistent with their size chart and sizing down from practice to racing fit, so our size-30 practice-suit male tester fit best in a size-26 tech suit.

Women's | $429–$449

Speedo offers both a closed and open back in this suit. Our competitive testers preferred the sleek, streamlined feel of the closed-back model. Sizing was consistent with their size chart, and the female tester who wears a size-30 practice suit found a great racing fit with the size 26. Thankfully, Speedo ditched the confusing dress-size chart from the previous LZR Elite and is back to a standard suit-sizing chart.
4. TYR | tyr.com

TYR didn’t release a new suit for this year, but testers were happy to test the AP 12 for the men and the Tracer B Series for the women, both excellent suits. TYR tends to run a full size smaller than other tech-suit brands, in both models, and in both men’s and women’s suits.

Men’s AP 12 | $259–$279

The black and gold styling of this suit makes it stand out among tech suits, and all the guys wanted to try it. Our male tester who normally wears a size-28 tech suit found the right fit in the size-30 AP 12. When we looked more closely at this, we couldn’t decide if the sizing is the issue or the fact that the material is so compressive that it’s difficult to get into is. Either way, sizing-up is recommended. Although there aren’t any silicone grippers at the waist and leg openings, none of the testers reported any slippage.

Women’s Tracer B Series | $319

Our size-26 testers needed a size-28 in the Tracer B. Like the AP 12, the Tracer B doesn’t have silicone grippers in the leg openings; testers with thinner legs did not feel that they got enough compression in the thighs with this suit, and the suit crept up a bit. The cutout in the back of the Tracer B is larger than for some other brands, but testers thought that it was flattering and comfortable. Testers reported excellent compression, buoyancy, and water repellency.

5. Aqua Sphere Energize

Compression | aquasphereswim.com

Aqua Sphere is another great choice for a newer competitor or one on a budget. The seams are not bonded, the fabric will not offer as much compression as the pricier brands, and the inseams are not as long, so taller swimmers won’t get full compression of the thigh area.

The Energize is a great-looking suit, with silver seam thread and in the women’s model, pink contrast panels. It also includes silicone grippers to help keep it in place.

Men’s | $100

Instead of separate front and back modesty panels, the men’s model includes a full inner brief liner, which testers preferred to the loose panels of the Agon. Fitting was in line with standard sizing-down for racing suits.

Women’s | $120

The women’s suit also fell in line with standard racing-suit sizing, and testers liked the fit and flattering cut. Testers also noted that the neckline did not bulge open when diving or pushing off the wall, even though one of the testers tried a suit that was too big for her.
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6. Agon Paper Suit | agonswim.com

Agon has changed its fabric since the last time we tested tech suits, and testers noticed a bit more compression in the newer fabric. In addition, modesty panels in both the women’s and men’s suits make the suit more opaque than previous models, which is a nice improvement.

Compression is good and the suit offers a reasonable amount of buoyancy. There aren’t any silicone grippers at the waist or leg openings and both styles are shorter in the legs, so taller or long-legged swimmers may not get coverage to the knees. Seams are exposed and sewn rather than bonded.

The Agon paper suit is an excellent choice for a new racer or a swimmer on a budget, and the ability to customize means the whole team can be outfitted in logos and colors.

Men’s | $81

Male testers reported that this suit runs large, so sizing-down is advised. The modesty panels should be adjusted in the locker room; attempts to do so in public might result in misunderstandings. Style points for a contrasting black and white striped drawstring.

Women’s | $111

The women’s suits also ran large, so size-down from regular tech-suit size and way down from practice suit size. One female tester who is normally a size 36 in a practice suit and a size 32 or 34 in tech suits fit snugly but comfortably in a size 30 in the Agon Paper. As with the men’s suit, the modesty panels in the Agon suits are not completely bonded to the outer fabric, so some adjustment may be necessary before walking out on deck.