

# Swim Bag: Specialty Fins

Product manufacturers and retailers provide the products reviewed in Swim Bag to SWIMMER at no cost.

BY LAURA HAMEL



**A**lthough we can become better, more efficient swimmers without any gear at all, introducing the occasional training aid can help target specific muscles or movements and refine technique in ways you might otherwise not discover. Most important, breaking up your training regimen with something new is a lot of fun. As always, consult with a knowledgeable coach—some drills can lead to injury if not performed properly—and use new items sparingly until you get the hang of how they work. In addition, always warm up without gear.

## 1. Aqua Sphere Alpha Fins | [swimoutlet.com](http://swimoutlet.com) | \$37

Opinions are always divided on the Alpha. Some swimmers love them and others don't—there's rarely middle ground. Their ultrasoft foam construction and open foot pocket design make these fins some of the most comfortable and well-fitting.

The Alphas are buoyant, and although newer swimmers appreciate the assist for better body position, many experienced swimmers find the extra flotation annoying. The buoyancy and curve of the blade, however, will breathe new life into your backstroke kick sets.



## 2. Speedo Nemesis Fins | [speedousa.com](http://speedousa.com) | \$40

As with the Aqua Sphere Alpha, these fins are supremely comfortable, well-fitting, and buoyant. Their crazy design, inspired by the scalloped edges of a humpback whale's fins, will raise eyebrows when you pull them out of your gear bag.

Some of the testers found the blade too flexible, and they struggled with getting purchase on the water, or felt like they weren't wearing fins at all.

The Nemesis will not replace regular fins, but can be used in specific kick drills to increase awareness of how a kick should feel. They feel natural and force your kick to become more effective to take advantage of the design—comparable to the workout you can get with a pair of short-bladed fins, only subtler.

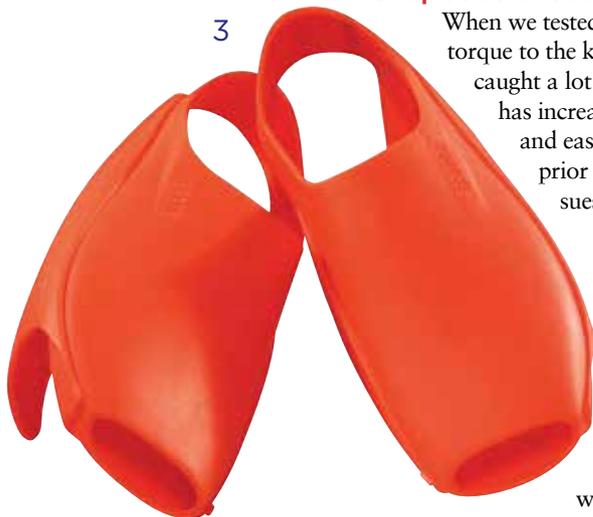


## 3. Speedo Breaststroke Fins | [speedousa.com](http://speedousa.com) | \$50

When we tested these fins in 2010, testers were nervous about torque to the knee and stress on the groin, since the blade caught a lot of water on the outswEEP. Since then, Speedo has increased the flexibility of the blade, making it safer and easier to use. Still, swimmers should warm up well prior to donning these, and swimmers with knee issues should avoid them.

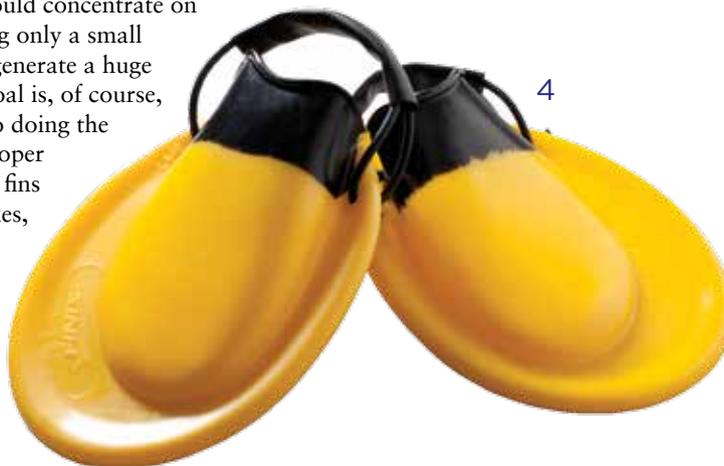
The Breaststroke Fins are comfortable and should be snug to be effective. A curved blade extends from the outside of the foot, where a breaststroker exerts force, creating resistance during the propulsive phase of the kick.

This is a great reminder about proper foot position and the ankle flexibility needed for an efficient kick—indeed, you won't go anywhere if your foot isn't in the proper position when wearing this fin.



## 4. FINIS Positive Drive Fin | [finisinc.com](http://finisinc.com) | \$24

Testers who have been fin-reliant in the past—those who still automatically reach for fins when an IM set is announced—loved these fins. They found they could concentrate on their technique while receiving only a small assist, because the fins don't generate a huge amount of propulsion. The goal is, of course, that the fin-reliant work up to doing the IM sets without fins, using proper technique. The Positive Drive fins can be worn for all four strokes, eliminating the need to do butterfly or flutter kick during the breaststroke leg or trying to hastily remove them mid-swim between the first and second halves of an IM.



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**FOR** Masters Swimmers  
**BY** Masters Swimmers



# Swim Bag: Monofins

Monofins can help swimmers develop proper technique for the butterfly kick and submerged dolphin kick, and they provide an excellent core workout. Breaststrokers also use monofins during breaststroke pull sets to enhance and reinforce proper technique during the arm recovery phase and the accompanying rise of the hips.

A proper fit is important for all fins (see fitting notes in the July-August 2015 fin review) but even more so when using a monofin. A too-large monofin sliding around on the feet creates a disconnect between the force being generated by the core and legs, and that will add unnecessary stress to the knees and ankles as the body searches for that connection. The monofin should feel like a natural extension of

the hips, legs, and feet—a mer-folk tail, really. The use of neoprene fin socks can help with a slightly-too-large fin, and thinner nylon socks can help prevent blisters in a slightly too-snug fin.

Care should be taken when learning to use a monofin, because injury can result with improper use—have a qualified coach check your technique. Swimmers with back problems or unstable joints could reinjure themselves practicing with a monofin. In addition, the sharp edges of the fiberglass blades on some of the models can be hazardous to surrounding swimmers—they shouldn't be used in crowded lanes. The Shooter and the Competitor (the Competitor is not reviewed in this issue, but will be in a future issue) both have fiberglass blades; the Foil does not.



## 5. FINIS Foil Monofin | [finisinc.com](http://finisinc.com) | \$60

Monofin newbies in the tester group started with the Foil. Its soft rubber construction and smaller blade make it easy and safe to learn how to drill with a monofin. A few testers reported that they were in between sizes (of which there are four) and couldn't get a proper fit with the Foil, even with a fin sock. A few also felt like the heel strap was too stretchy, which prevented the fin from feeling like an extension of their feet. Overall, however, newbies and experienced monofinners loved swimming with it.



## MONOFIN PRO TIP



**Misty Hyman at the 2012 Marriott USMS Summer National Championship in Omaha, Neb.**

*Peter H. Bick*

Misty Hyman, Olympic gold medalist, butterfly specialist, and Masters swimmer, trains with the FINIS Foil, which was designed by her coach, Bob Gillett. Here she offers a few tips for training with one.

“The Foil helps swimmers work on both sides of their kick (front and back). Make sure the knees bend to whip the fin on the way forward, but that the legs stay straight on the way back. Use the glutes and hamstrings and arch the back to move the legs behind you to get propulsion on the back part of the kick.”

Hyman also uses the monofin for an endurance core workout: “In addition to working underwater kicks, you can use a snorkel and kick streamline dolphin kick, facedown, on the surface. Be sure to use your core. Start the whip of the kick with the shoulders and the chest. If you're undulating properly, your snorkel will not submerge.”

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## 6. Finis Shooter Monofin | [finisinc.com](http://finisinc.com) | \$150

Solid technique, supple and healthy joints, and strong core and legs are necessary to properly and safely use this monofin. This model is also more difficult to control, and a few testers zig-zagged into walls and under lanelines before achieving a straight line. The Shooter's blade is much more rigid than the

Foil's, which translates to more power and higher speeds.

Our experienced testers flat-out loved the Shooter and felt that it's the perfect tool for honing the techniques needed for powerful submerged dolphin kicks after starts and walls, as well as for improving efficiency and strength in butterfly.



### »»» LOCALLY GROWN

The fiberglass blades for the Shooter are made in California and the fins are assembled in FINIS's facility in Livermore. Proximity to Silicon Valley has allowed FINIS to take advantage of local materials engineering expertise from the high-tech circuit-board industry. CEO John Mix says it took trial and error to perfect the bonding process between the blade and the natural rubber foot pocket—some of the early models had a tendency to separate—but better bonding techniques have solved that problem.

Becca Wyant/FINIS Inc

# Swim Bag: Fin Socks

If you have a difficult time finding a perfect fin fit, or struggle with rubbing and blistering, a pair of fin socks can help.

## 7. FINIS Skin Socks | [finisinc.com](http://finisinc.com) | \$14

Testers loved these comfy neoprene socks, which can make a slightly too-large fin fit better and prevent chafing. They can also help with warmth if your feet tend to get cold.

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## 8. Sporti Nylon Spandex Swim Socks | [swimoutlet.com](http://swimoutlet.com) | \$10

These thinner nylon socks won't provide any thermal protection, but they do help with chafing. A few testers found that the combination of thin nylon socks placed over a little TRISLIDE or other lubricant resolved their chafing issues even with the most ill-fitting fins.

Timothy O'Donnell  
Professional Triathlete



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