Our tech suit testers were excited about this year’s tech suit review (our last was in 2014), as great strides in combining comfort, compression, and eye-catching design have made the latest models fun to wear and exciting to swim in.

Tech suits are specialized and designed for elite swimmers—think Olympic swimmers—whose tall, thin, muscular physiques and years of full-time training mesh into moments of glory on the world’s stage. Their suits must be perfect.

And many Masters swimmers take their racing seriously—there are USMS elites who regularly break USMS and world records. We even have a few members who defy aging by qualifying for Olympic Trials in their 30s and 40s. These swimmers are every bit as serious about what they do as the Olympians are.

The rest of us are fortunate to have the benefit of years of design and engineering research based on the swimmers at the top of our sport. It’s exciting to race like a champion, even if you don’t end up on the podium.

And there are benefits to wearing tech suits other than winning medals. Many Masters swimmers like the way the suits look and feel: the flattering fit, increased coverage, and buoyancy and compression that helps them ride high, feel fast in the water, and recover faster.

The nice thing is, we have options: If you’re looking for some of the benefits without the big price tag, take a look on these manufacturers’ websites for models that come with fewer bells and whistles but make better sense for your competition goals and your budget.
1. TYR AVICTOR PRELUDE | TYR.COM | MEN’S JAMMER $350; WOMEN’S OPEN BACK $480

TYR’s Avictor Prelude is a serious tech suit for swimmers looking to swim serious times. It’s difficult to get into, but worth the effort once you’re in it. Compression was excellent, and testers felt buoyant and fast in the water, reporting no slippage or water incursion. Our taller testers appreciated the length of the suit’s legs.

Most of our testers sized up, but since this suit comes in half-sizes, that could mean sizing up two increments instead of one. Taller male testers recommended the high-waist model for better coverage.

Our female testers needed time and effort to get into their suits, as the straps on the Avictor Prelude are not as yielding as the ones on the Tracer B series (we were unable to test the women’s AP12 in our 2014 review, so we don’t have that comparison). Once the suit was on, the straps held everything securely in place during starts and turns, with moderate flexibility and no water incursion. The straps became uncomfortable for testers if they wore the suit for too long, so they pulled the straps down between their events. This didn’t dampen their enthusiasm for this great racing suit.

NOTE: The men’s suit is available with a high waist and the women’s with a closed back.
2. SPEEDO / LZR RACER X | SPEEDOUSA.COM | MEN’S JAMMER $349; WOMEN’S KNEESKIN $479

As always, testers were excited to try Speedo’s latest tech suit, as their design and engineering teams are at the forefront of tech suit technology (see sidebar).

The first thing they noticed was the beauty of the suit, resplendent in solid black or bright purple-fuchsia with iridescent bonding and compression seams, and bling in the shoulder straps.

The second thing they noticed was how difficult the LZR Racer X is to get on. This is a serious suit for serious competitors, and the donning ritual isn’t for the faint of heart or anyone who isn’t super ambitious about their times. You’ll need a friend or two and about 20 minutes to help you get into this suit.

Once on, the suit provides excellent buoyancy and torso compression. Women reported that the straps, which were very tight when donning, were comfortable and stretched appropriately during starts and turns. Our male testers recommended the high-waist model over the standard version for most Masters swimmers unless they’re slim and compact.

Speedo wearers will need to size up from previous Speedo models to get this suit on, and since half-sizes are now available, it might be more than one increment. Only our testers with larger quads and thighs got great compression in the legs. Others reported that the legs were loose-fitting, as though they were designed primarily for powerful sprinter quads.

Although the LZR Racer X is a technical powerhouse, a few of our regular Speedo testers remain loyal to the previous model, the LZR Elite 2, which accommodates more body types and takes less time to get into.

NOTE: The men’s suit is available with a high waist and the women’s with a closed back.

3. FINIS FUSE | FINISINC.COM | MEN’S JAMMER $120; WOMEN’S RACE JOHN $170

Testers were impressed with the new Fuse and appreciated a lower-priced option. They rated the suit extremely comfortable with good compression. The sharp, solid colors were a big hit with both men and women.

Testers didn’t experience any strap creep or water incursion when diving or turning, and female testers reported that the rib cage area felt secure but not overly compressed. Several testers reported that the leg openings were too tight for them to wear for very long, but other testers felt this was a benefit to keeping the suit in place during starts and turns. Our taller testers would have liked the suit to have longer legs.

FINIS’s size chart is simple; it advises to just size down one to two sizes from your training suit, and that appeared to be accurate for all our testers—most of them selected a suit two sizes smaller than their training suit size.

Overall, testers were surprised at the level of quality and functionality in a suit priced well below many other suits.
When testing various fabrics for incorporation into the new LZR Racer X suit, Speedo athletes and the design team looked for the so-called “silvering effect.” Kate Wilton, Speedo’s senior director of merchandising and design, explains: “When a fabric doesn’t absorb water when you dive in, it has this silver, shimmery-ness that appears on it,” and this is a very important factor for elite swimmers because they know it means the water repellency of the fabric is very high.

This was such a critical component of testing that “we got to the point where we’d all be lined up, standing by the side of pool,” Wilton says. “You can really see the effect from the top when you’re looking down on a swimmer when they do a pencil drop into the water. We were all standing there, looking to see if it appeared silver or not.”

Some suits survived the test; others did not. “No matter how good the water repellency tested in the lab, if the swimmers did not see silver, they didn’t think it was fast,” Wilton says, proving that perception is a big component of a swimmer’s feeling of fast.

For more on Speedo’s design and development process for the LZR Racer X and a brief history of technical suits, see our web companion piece, “Let’s Get Technical” at usms.org. —ELAINE K. HOWLEY
SWIM BAG

5. MP XPRESSO DESIGNED BY AQUA SPHERE | MICHAELPHELPS.COM | MEN’S $300; WOMEN’S $450

Aqua Sphere has truly entered the tech suit market with the MP XPRESSO. The balance between comfort and compression achieved with the lightweight, yet tough fabric meant this suit got high marks all around from our testers.

The MP XPRESSO has two layers on the torso, and there’s a slight texturing to the outer layer. The fabric stretches enough to get the suit on, but then contracts and provides compression with excellent flexibility. This was especially true for our female testers, who reported comfort and security in the strap design, as well as a flattering fit with no water incursion.

The suit legs are not dual-layered as the rest of the suit is, but rather consist of a single layer of the textured fabric with compression panel insets on the inner thighs. Testers experienced great hip and leg compression off their starts and walls.

The size chart appeared accurate for both men and women. Testers with longer torsos or legs said that they would prefer a “long” option in the sizing or a longer leg length. The generous sizing options in the MP XPRESSO will appeal to full-figured competitors.

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