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Wetsuits

BY LAURA HAMEL PHOTOS BY MIKE CARBONARO

For this year's open water issue, we selected three wetsuits to test: the Aqua Sphere Challenger, ROKA Maverick X, and TYR Hurricane Category 3. All three offer excellent quality in three different price ranges. To view more in-depth information about wetsuits and additional reviews, check our prior reviews in the 2014 and 2015 open water (March-April) issues, available via your My USMS account at usms.org.

Note: The term "ankle panels" relates to relative proximity—except on swimmers with shorter legs, wetsuit leg openings don't actually sit at the ankles, but well above them. The panels are designed to make removal over the ankles and feet easier.

AQUA SPHERE CHALLENGER | AQUASPHERESWIM.COM | \$349.99

Available in eight men's sizes (XXS–XXL) and six women's sizes (XXS–XL)

We've tested Aqua Sphere's high-end suit, the Phantom, and their entry-level Pursuit, but this was a first for the Challenger. This newly upgraded suit packs a lot of quality into a great price.

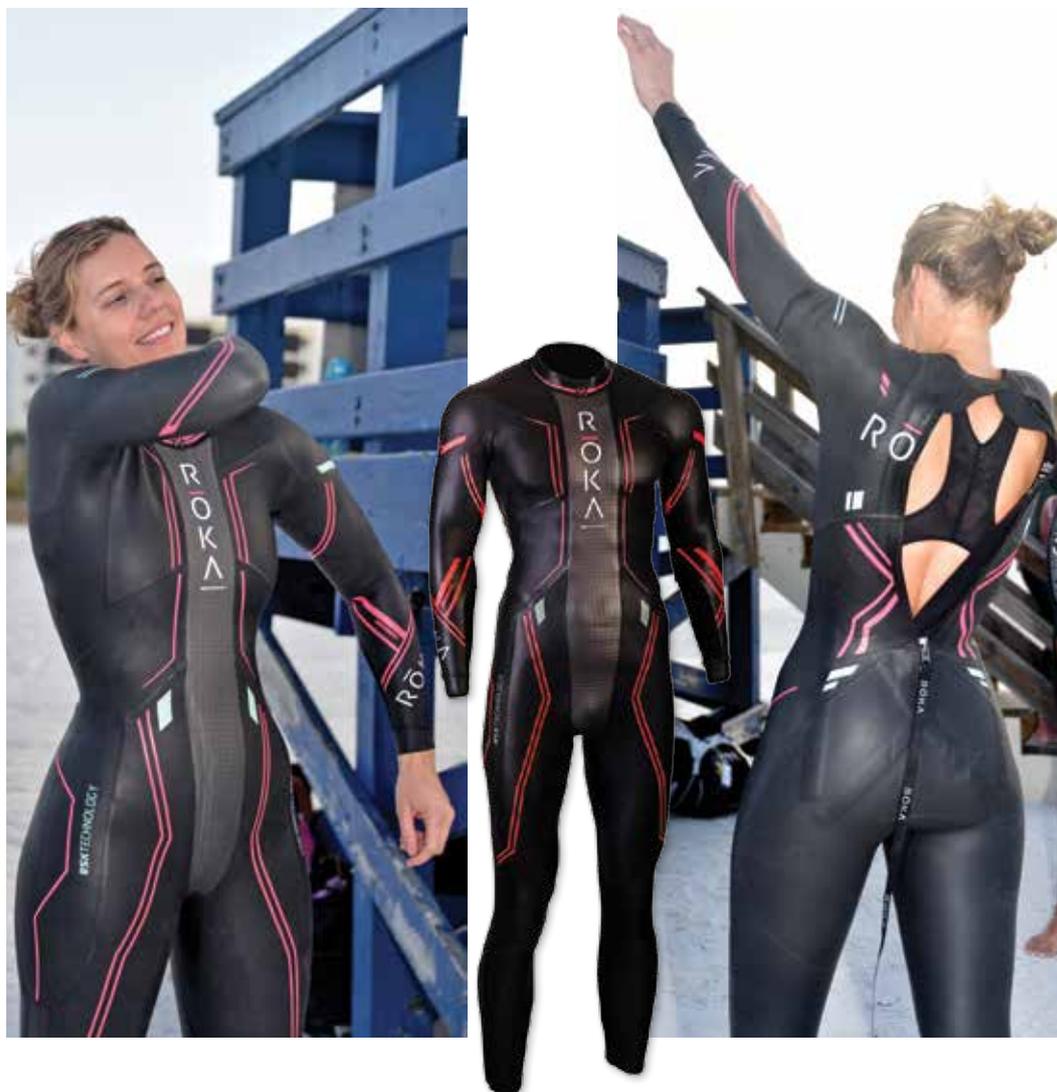
Our testers were impressed with the flexibility of the shoulders—thin, soft neoprene and strategically placed panels made the upper half of this suit fit like a more expensive model. The lower half isn't overly thick and buoyant, which is ideal for swimmers with naturally good body position. The thinner neoprene of the legs won't offer as much of an assist to swimmers who want more buoyancy, and this suit isn't as warm as others.

Testers liked the quick-release ankle panels, which made T1 transitions a breeze. The flexible wrist panels also made donning and doffing easy. However, testers with thinner arms and legs experienced some water incursion at both the wrists and ankles. Testers liked the small hook-and-loop patch at the base of the zipper, which provides the option to secure the zipper pull at the small of the back rather than in the neck fastener.

RECAP

- **Flexible shoulders**—feels like a more expensive suit
- **Neutrally buoyant**—better for swimmers with naturally good body position
- **Thinner panels**—better for temperate waters
- **Flexible legs**—for an easier run to T1
- **Quick-release ankle and wrist panels**—for faster wetsuit removal
- **Looser cuffs**—athletes with thinner arms and legs might take on water





ROKA MAVERICK X | ROKA.COM | \$900

Available in nine men's sizes (XS–XL) and 11 women's sizes (XS–XL)

ROKA has taken the wetsuit market by storm, and our testers were excited to try the Maverick X. The X is a reference to the da Vinci-esque posture of arms held high, legs apart. Because the suit is cut and assembled in that default position, there isn't any pulling on the shoulders when swimmers reach with their strokes.

Testers reported an excellent, snug fit, with no constriction anywhere—several remarked that they felt like they weren't wearing a wetsuit at all. Even our swimmers who eschew full-sleeve wetsuits because of shoulder constriction reported that the Maverick X had the best shoulder flex of any suit they had tried.

Our testers loved this suit not only for its amazing shoulder mobility, but also for its other great features. Testers noted that the wrist cuffs, which incorporate a catch panel, were secure—they didn't let any water in—but also flexible enough to be removed over wrist-mounted electronic devices. The flexible ankle panels made removing the suit easier. The interior of the Maverick X is very smooth, making it easy to don as well as comfortable to wear—it doesn't stick to the skin.

RECAP

- **Extremely flexible shoulders**—best of the bunch
- **Great buoyancy**—will improve body position for swimmers who need it
- **Great warmth**—thicker neoprene throughout the trunk and leg panels
- **Soft inner lining**—for more comfort and mobility
- **Flexible, yet secure ankle panels and wrist cuffs**—for easy removal with no water incursion
- **Speed**—rides high and fast in the water

Tested
FOR Masters Swimmers
BY Masters Swimmers



TYR HURRICANE CATEGORY 3 | TYR.COM | \$549.99

Available in eight men's sizes (XS–XXL) and seven women's sizes (XS–XL)

We've tested the top-end Category 5 and the entry-level Category 1, but this is the first time for the midrange Category 3. This suit has some of the same great features as the Cat 5, including, as is always the case with TYR, unique and eye-catching colors and styling.

The shoulders are flexible, and the suit is a great blend of swimmer- and triathlete-focused features. The wrist cuffs are secure. The addition of hard plastic catch-panels gave some testers a struggle when removing the suit over large wrist-mounted devices, but the panels did make them pay attention to their catch and grip on the water. The ankle cuffs have a subtle thin panel that keeps them flexible for removal, but secure—testers didn't experience any water incursion with this suit.

The leg panels in the Cat 3 aren't all the same thickness—the thighs are thinner and the shins thicker. This gives the suit some good buoyancy for those who need it, but not so much that swimmers with good body position will feel like they're fighting the float. Our triathlete testers also remarked that the thinner thigh panels made running up the beach and removing the suit easier.

RECAP

- **Flexible shoulders**—swimmer-focused for maximum reach
- **Good buoyancy**—will improve body position for swimmers who need it, but not be too buoyant for swimmers who don't
- **Good warmth**—good for colder or longer swims
- **Secure**—yet flexible ankle panels and wrist cuffs
- **Plastic catch-panels**—for focus on catch and grip on the water





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Donning and Fitting Tips

See the March-April 2014 issue for a step-by-step tutorial if you've never worn a wetsuit before. Here are some highlights:

- Trim your nails. Pinch the neoprene gently, using the pads of your fingers.
- Think about rolling the suit on, rather than just pulling it on.
- Make sure the crotch and armpit panels of the suit are snugged up against you. Your shoulders will fatigue if the suit is pulling down because those panels aren't seated properly.
- Once zipped, the suit should feel quite snug, but you should be able to stand and walk normally and breathe comfortably.
- If it gaps open at the neck, armholes, or in the small of your back, or you can easily move it around over your skin, it's too big.
- If you feel a strong downward pulling sensation on your shoulders (and the crotch and armpits are seated properly) or you're having trouble breathing, it's too small.
- Neck chafing is inevitable when swimming in a wetsuit, especially in salt water. SBR Sports' TRISLIDE silicone spray lubricant is the best defense. Our testers don't swim without it.

- Consult size charts and consider your body morphology (long or short torso, wide or narrow hips, etc.) in addition to your height and weight. Most brands make combination sizes to account for morphological differences.



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