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# Buoyancy Aids and More

BY LAURA HAMEL



Coach and ALTS instructor Bill Meier of the Simon's Rock PaceMakers workout group of New England Masters Swim Club says these four swimmers Jerry Kraus, Dan Whitehead, Buck Smith, and Harry Hartford—AKA the Lane 1 Guys—appreciate the extra buoyancy offered by ROKA's SIM Shorts. "As you can see from the smiles on their faces, they love the SIM Shorts. All of them struggle with keeping their lower bodies close to the surface, which can be disheartening."

Bill Meier

## ROKA SIM PRO II BUOYANCY SHORTS | ROKA.COM | \$120

If you're just learning to swim, struggle with poor body position, or have a raging pull-buoy addiction, SIM Pro II Shorts are for you. Our testers, even the ones who don't meet these criteria, loved swimming in them. (Who doesn't love beating a teammate in the next lane over just by donning a pair of magic shorts?)

SIM Shorts offer just the right amount of buoyancy to give you a balanced body position, so that energy you would spend maintaining good form is now available for forward movement. Working on your technique and core strength so that you can perform without a buoyancy aid is the goal, but a little assist during training can help you understand what perfect body position is supposed to feel like, which is critical when you're striving for it.

There are also psychological benefits to getting a boost in the water, especially for anyone discouraged by a slow-down caused by

aging or injury. Several coaches and ALTS instructors gave the SIM Shorts the thumbs up for their ability to turn a swimmer's practice experience around with a performance and confidence boost.

Testers loved the flotation offered by the SIM Shorts, which feels much more natural than that of a pull buoy. Plus, not having a buoy means you can use your legs to kick normally.

Testers reported that the shorts are easy to put on, comfortable to wear, and durable. One coach has a swimmer who's been wearing an earlier version of the SIM Shorts for two years with no deterioration.

The only thing testers would change is the drawstring. These low-rise shorts don't sit at the natural waist, and to prevent them from taking in water off the walls, the drawstring must be cinched up tight. Testers said they would prefer a cord lock or similar option to make tightening the string easier, as tying a standard bow was ineffective unless it was a double, which made it hard to untie.

Available in six men's and five women's sizes.

## ROKA PRO SWIM KICKBOARD | ROKA.COM | \$24

This svelte, solid kickboard is sized to pack in a swim bag but big enough for most swimmers. The chiseled edges that give the top of the board its unique appearance are comfortable to hold during kick sets.



Amanda Janszen of the Dayton Area Sharks tests the ROKA Pro Swim Kickboard.  
*Laura Hamel*

## ROKA PRO SWIM PULL BUOY | ROKA.COM | \$18

This dog-bone-style foam pull buoy is attractive, comfortable, and sturdy. Testers reported no slippage during pull sets. Available in two sizes.



Sisters Ginny Trimble and Genevieve Miller of Dayton Area Sharks fight over who gets to test the ROKA Pro Swim Pull Buoy.  
*Laura Hamel*

We had only one ROKA pull buoy and one kickboard during testing, and every morning at practice it was a race to see who would grab them first—everyone wanted to use them. Both products are soft, comfortable, and, with their unique look, easy to find on deck.

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



## FINIS EDGE | FINISINC.COM | \$55

FINIS's Edge fins are serious technique tools, designed to work your kick in both directions. The shape and pitch of the fin blades allow you to catch water on your up-kick, something that often gets ignored during kick sets. This creates both strength-building resistance and speed, especially when dolphin kicking under water.

These fins aren't as flexible as the similarly shaped DMC Silicone Elite, another tester favorite, and a few of our testers with stiff ankles couldn't wear the Edge fins comfortably. But our competitive testers with strong legs enjoyed using these fins for sprint-kick sets, in which they swam at blazing speeds while perfecting their kick technique.

The Edge's combination of soft silicone and an open foot-pocket design means no blisters. Most of our testers reported that FINIS's most advanced fin is a win. Available in seven sizes.



Leslie Dumont of the Andover North Andover YMCA workout group of New England Masters Swim Club checks out the FINIS Edge fins.  
*Laura Hamel*



## FINIS SWIMEARS | FINISINC.COM | \$60

FINIS's SwimEars are designed to keep water out and to allow sound in. The Christmas-tree-style silicone plugs function just like other tiered earplugs, with some important distinctions—one being the so-called “stabilizer wings,” which are soft silicone extensions that fit gently into the nooks and crannies of your ears and help keep the plugs in place. For anyone who hasn't been able to get a good fit with tiered plugs, the wings make a big difference. Each set of SwimEars comes with three different sized plugs and two sets of stabilizer wings. Experimentation is needed to get everything fitted correctly, but once you're set, the earplugs stay in place and are very comfortable.

Once you have a good fit, you'll enjoy being able to hear your coach's gentle reminders about your dropped elbows without any shouting. The waterproof acoustic membrane keeps water out but allows sound in. Being able to hear is also important in open water swimming, so our open water testers gave SwimEars a thumbs-up for safety.

SwimEars come with a lanyard to keep them with you in the event they do fall out, and everything comes in a smart little zippered case with a carabiner to attach it to your swim bag.