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Paddles, Fins, and More

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MP TECHNIQUE PADDLE | MICHAELPHELPS.COM | \$20

The newly released MP Technique Paddle is designed to help swimmers improve the front part of their strokes.

The paddles stretch from swimmers' fingers to above their wrists, which keeps swimmers from bending their wrists, keeps their elbows high, and forces them to get on top of the water. The paddles draw attention to the area that extends from the fingers to the elbow—a swimmer's natural paddle—which reinforces an early vertical forearm and helps swimmers find their ideal anchor point or catch.

Swimmers can wear the paddles with their fingers curled over the edge, akin to doing a semi-fist drill, or with their fingers in their normal, relaxed swimming position. One tester said gripping the paddles over the top helped make them feel more stable. Other testers preferred tightening the tubing for increased stability, so they could relax their hands and focus on their technique.

Testers recommend using the paddles on longer, slower sets in which technique is the focus, rather than strength-building or speed. Testers also advised using the paddles on a few repetitions within a set, then removing them for a few reps to reinforce the technique being learned.

Testers liked the paddle's design, which has holes over the swimmer's palms, forearms, and wrists, allowing for a great feel of the water. One tester found that the paddles helped her eliminate the crossover in her stroke. The paddles come in one size and it fit all our testers.



FINIS ISO PADDLE | FINISSWIM.COM | \$20

The FINIS Iso Paddles may look funky, but they pack a lot of versatility into a small package. They're built to create an imbalance during the catch phase of each stroke, something that forces swimmers to apply more pressure on both sides of the paddle to maintain proper technique. This improves feel for the water and helps swimmers make subtle adjustments to their stroke.

Different muscle groups are activated depending on how the paddles are worn. The "inside isolation" configuration, for butterfly and breaststroke, works the biceps, deltoids, and pectoral muscles, and the "outside isolation" configuration, for backstroke and freestyle, works the triceps and trapezius muscles.

The paddles don't have any straps, which forces swimmers to maintain proper technique to keep the paddles in place. Our testers used the Iso Paddles successfully for all four strokes.

One tester said that these paddles did a good job of finding weak points in his technique, which is beneficial for finding the right drills for improvement. Another said the paddles helped him maintain a good feel for the water.

FINIS provides a short set on its workouts and training tips website, and these paddles can be used on drills and stroke-specific sets during practice. They come in small and medium. Medium, which *SWIMMER* tested, should fit most Masters swimmers.



TYR RIPTIDE KICKBOARD DRAG CHUTE | TYR.COM | \$30

The TYR Riptide Kickboard Drag Chute is something of a rarity on the market. The only other recently released kickboard resistance training tool that comes to mind is the Brick, a 6-pound kickboard that *SWIMMER* wrote about in the November-December 2015 issue.

The parachute slides onto the top of a kickboard and cinches easily into place with a clip. Swimmers can adjust how much resistance they face by opening or closing the back of the chute with a cord. Even the easiest setting (all the way open) offered noticeable resistance.

Our testers raved about the Kickboard Drag Chute, which doesn't come with a kickboard. To be clear, the testers who regularly make the kick intervals at practice enjoyed this device. Others considered it a form of torture, as they weren't making the kick intervals to begin with, but they could see its potential.

One described it as "a great tool to improve your kick" and said that she "would use it often in practice." A tester who is also a coach likes the Kickboard Drag Chute for swimmers with good technique, but pointed out that swimmers with poor kick technique should fix that first, before adding resistance. Another found that the easiest setting slowed him down by about 10 to 15 percent, and another praised the product for being lightweight and easy to stuff in a gear bag.

Tested
FOR Masters
Swimmers
BY Masters
Swimmers



TYR RIPTIDE DRAG CHUTE | TYR.COM | \$70

SWIMMER last tested parachutes and other forms of resistance training in depth in the November-December 2011 issue, and it seems that these types of training devices have increased in popularity since then. It's easy to see why: Parachutes help build strength, power, and aerobic endurance.

The TYR Riptide Drag Chute fits swimmers comfortably with a wide belt and snaps into place easily, which makes putting the product on and taking it off easy.

The amount of resistance can be easily adjusted by opening or closing the back of the parachute with a cord. However, it's difficult to obtain the same amount of resistance over multiple uses with the Riptide Drag Chute, compared with the FINIS Drag+Fly, which *SWIMMER* reviewed in the July- August 2017 issue. The Drag+Fly has a zipper that runs alongside a set of numbers, making it easy to return to a previous setting.

Because parachutes have lengthy towlines, using them in a short course pool with lots of other swimmers can be difficult. Most testers prefer using them in long course pools or open water or on a day when they have fewer swimmers in their lanes.

As with all parachutes, depending upon kick amplitude, swimmers might kick the cord on occasion, and that can be adjusted somewhat by the positioning of the buoy that slides along the cord.



MP ALPHA PRO FIN | MICHAELPHELPS.COM | \$37

Aqua Sphere released its Alpha Fins a few years ago, ones that received mixed reviews in the September-October 2015 issue of *SWIMMER*. The company has since released the Alpha Pro Fins, a revamped version, under the MP product line it runs.

The Alpha Fins and Alpha Pro Fins are shaped the same. The short blade helps mimic race pace kicking tempo, and the design is meant to enforce a proper kicking motion while wearing the fins. But that's where the similarities end.

The Alpha Pro Fins are noticeably lighter, something that helps poor kickers keep their hips and legs closer to the surface and maintain proper body position. The fins are also made with a material that's much more rigid, which provides more propulsion. This led one tester to say they were the best he's used on freestyle flip turns, and he praised how comfortable the fins were. However, he added, using the fins felt awkward when his kick came out of the water while doing freestyle with a good body position.

Another tester said the fins made doing flutter kick with his usual amplitude difficult.

Testers reported that the fins were better for backstroke than freestyle and that dolphin kick was easier than flutter kick. One highlight, they added, was that the Alpha Pro forced them to focus on the upkick on freestyle flutter kick and the downkick on backstroke flutter kick, two things that even experienced swimmers need to be reminded of.

The Alpha Pro Fins come in seven sizes, a range that covers men's shoe sizes from 2 to 14 and women's sizes from 4 to 16. A tester with a wide foot found it best to move up a size from his shoe size because the fins are supposed to fit snugly.