

Open Water Swimming – Steven Grist

Open water is swimming in places such as a lake, a mere, docks or a river. I have always enjoyed this kind of swimming, I always train in a pool and it is something different.

My first ever open water competition was last year at the NWR championships in Salford Quays. I thought I would give it a go as I prefer long distance swims to sprints. The distance for that competition was 1500m – three times around the quays. Anyone over 12 can enter this competition, you do not need an entry time but you should be able to do a 1500m swim in a pool in a good time. I came first in my age group which was 12, I was made up to get the gold medal. My coach informed me the next day that because I came first in the North West Region – I had qualified for Open Water Nationals – I was over the moon (and I would get a national hoodie)☺ The Nationals were held at Rother Valley in Sheffield, it was an amazing experience with some fantastic swimmers – I came 7th in my age group which I was proud of. Swimming at Nationals was my goal, and I did it! For these competitions you are not allowed to wear a wetsuit, however there are competitions around where you can use them. (I prefer just my jammers, cap and goggles).

In order to train for the open water competitions, taster sessions are held at Salford Quays prior to the NWR competition and I learnt some good tips – such as getting into the water slowly to climatise, warm up in there and then come out prior to your race. That way your body is used to the coldness of the water, so when you dive in at the race it is not such a shock. The coldest water I have swam in was 13 degrees, it was a taster session this year at Budworth Mere – that was cold!!!! I also train in Liverpool Watersports Centre, the docks there do have jelly fish but they don't sting. There is a lot of banter from the locals and we all get along great, there is also a massive water trampoline which we do somersaults off into the docks – fab! Amy, Alexandra and Ellen also train there, Sunday mornings whenever possible.

Other tips are to drink flat, full sugar Coca Cola – not Pepsi or any other brand, it must be proper Coke. This should be drunk before and after the swim as it will kill most bacteria that could be swallowed during my swim – it has worked so far for me. I have known people to come down with nasty stomach bugs who have competed in the same events as me – they did not drink Coke. Jelly Babies also help to take the taste of the water away well that's what I tell my mum ☺

Another tip from me is after the swim, particularly if it is very cold, to warm up SLOWLY. Don't jump straight into a hot shower as your brain will think you have warmed up, but actually your core will be freezing and you can go into hyperthermia – this happened to me after training in the docks last year in October, when it was starting to get colder. You should warm up slowly with layers of clothing, hat, gloves and socks, make sure all your extremities are covered. Drink warm drinks to warm your insides.

This year I have competed in NWR and National Open Water events again. I have also competed in a Warrington Dolphins event at Budworth Mere which was a two mile race, I came second in that one at junior level. I would recommend anyone to have a go, its lots of fun and something different to the pool, it also helps with stamina. Before you compete in any open water event I highly recommend you get some practice in first as I have seen many people go in for a race and they come in confident and come out in tears.

The first time I went in for training all the adults started laughing thinking I probably couldn't swim I soon showed them who was boss ☺ I was nearly twelve when I first got in to the freezing water and I loved it especially when all my team mates from pool swimming joined like Amy Compton who came first in the Liverpool dock 2 mile swim and Alexandra Williams who came first in the 2 mile breast stroke and next season hopefully more people will join!