

BUYER'S GUIDE

VESTED TRI-SUITS

Sleeved suits may be taking triathlon by storm, but there's still a place for the reliable vested tri-suit. Jack Sexty and Niamh Lewis test seven each

SLEEVES

Vested suits will provide more freedom of movement than a short-sleeved option.

ZIPPER

Usually at the front, the zipper should be complemented by a housing to prevent neck chafing.

JARGON BUSTER**HYDRODYNAMIC**

You'll want your suit to have some hydrodynamic qualities for non-wetsuit swimming.

COLDBLACK

A patented technology that allows black fabrics to block out the sun's rays and be breathable all at once.

UPFRATING

Look for this in the product description to find out how much UV protection your suit will provide in the sun.

**LEG GRIPPERS**

A close fit with no irritation is the golden gripper standard.

CHAMOIS

A tri-suit pad needs to keep you comfy on the bike, and not feel saggy on the run.

As 2018 gets into full swing and the race season is upon us, tri is embroiled in an arms race (ha!) when it comes to multisport apparel. That is, whether to choose a tri-suit with short sleeves or a vested style.

Sleeved suits weren't widely popularised until this decade, with long-course athletes in particular adopting them for their drag-reducing benefits. If you're not fussed by marginal gains, increased sun protection through better coverage is a more practical reason for age-groupers. And sleeved suits have now caught on over all race distances, buoyed further by the ITU allowing them to be used in competition in 2016. So, they're more aero, look cooler and you can use them in pretty much any race... so why would anyone still go sleeveless?

For a start, less fabric and bare arms will keep you cooler if you really struggle with overheating. You'll also get more freedom of movement, particularly useful for pool triathlons where you don't have a wetsuit over the top.

And finally, because there's less material, they're often cheaper! For your first triathlon, that could well start in a pool, it's wise to go for an affordable vested suit rather than risk restricting yourself in the swim. If you get the bug from then on, you can start experimenting and investing in different suits depending on what types of races you have planned for the season.

The 14 tri-suits in this test range from no-frills budget to the highly technical and everything in between. So, whether you're a first-timer or seasoned multisporter in the market for a new tri-suit, one of our vested recommendations should perfectly fit your race-day needs.

HOW WE TESTED

The suits here were tested in a host of outdoor conditions, and also indoor sessions to try out the breathability of each suit. We ran plenty of miles and had swims in each suit to test out the drying properties and comfort across all three sports, paying particular attention to the integration of the chamois pad at the rear. We also marked each suit on its ability to dry quickly, as well as aesthetics, pockets, price, zippers and grippers.



220
TRIATHLON
BEST
VALUE

220
TRIATHLON
BEST ON
TEST

HUUB DS SUIT

£159.99 This high-end suit is infused with Coldblack technology, which reduces heat absorption and provides at least UPF30 protection, with mesh venting across the back for extra breathability. The material is quite rigid, but it's more hydrodynamic than your standard nylon and it feels fast through the water. It feels properly compressive and has a slim drag-reducing fit with enough unrestrictive stretch. We did experience slight underarm irritation, but this likely was down to the tight fit as the seams are well covered; if you're of a slim build it won't be an issue. 'DS' refers to Dave Scott, who works with Huub on the range. huubdesign.com

85%
VERDICT BIG BUCKS, BUT WORTH IT FOR THE SERIOUS TRIATHLETE

DHB CLASSIC

£66 The Classic isn't quite as loud as Dhb's Blok collection, but the fluoro, blue or grey colourways means there's lots of choice. It punches above its weight, with a well-engineered (if narrow) chamois that doesn't sag and comfy grippers. The fabric is soft against the skin and is especially comfortable under the arms. It also uses Xtra Life Lycra like Orca's Core suit. While it's not the most breathable, a UPF50 rating means you get decent sun protection everywhere except the back's mesh section. The pockets each side of the lower back are roomy enough for gels or energy bars. And it can often be found half price, which is a steal. wiggles.co.uk

83%
VERDICT BASIC BUT VERY GOOD, AND AT A BARGAIN PRICE

LUSSO SHATTERED

£89.99 For us, the Shattered from Lusso wins the style points here. The wide pad (15.5cm across) is beginner-friendly yet doesn't cause any distraction on the run and dries quickly. The sizeable leg grippers are comfortable without being too tight, there's a good housing over the YKK zipper and the seams are flatlocked around the shoulders and underarms to prevent irritation. A shortfall is the small pockets: they're narrow and positioned right in the middle so they're difficult to access. The soft Italian fabric is breathable and mostly makes up for the lack of venting, but it's not ideal for the hottest days. lusso.bike

79%
VERDICT A GOOD LOOKING AND COMFY SUIT FOR SHORT RACES

AIROFIN SPARTAN BLAZE

£129.99 Vested suits suitable for sprint right through to iron-distance races are increasingly less common, but the Spartan Blaze from Airofin ticks these boxes. The front zipper opens fully for easy access, the two large 'floating' pockets can house plenty of nutrition and the venting keeps you cool (although doesn't provide much sun protection). While we found Airofin's Maori tri top too wide, this suit is a streamlined race fit, but the legs did sit well above the knee. The chamois is the same as Dhb's Classic suit, which is slim but comfy enough for long rides. airofin.com

91%
VERDICT BREATHABLE AND SLIM-FITTING SUIT WITH IRON FEATURES



ORCA CORE

£99 The fabric in Orca's Core is made from 'Xtra Life' Lycra, thought to be more resistant to wear and tear, and the water repellent coating makes for faster swimming. Highlights of the Core include durability, a comfy chamois and decent leg grippers. While it dries quickly, the all-nylon front doesn't hug the body and feels hot and restrictive. The two pockets are well positioned either side of your lower back for easy access, although they'll only house small gel packets. There's sadly no neck guard, plus the exposed stitching around the arms is a source of irritation. Orca's 226 suit is far superior and we'd recommend spending the extra. orca.com/gb

72% **VERDICT** BASIC FOR THE PRICE, WITH FEW STANDOUT FEATURES



ZONE3 LAVA

£139 Zone3's Lava is a familiar sight at races, arguably due to the more relaxed fit than many high-end suits, comfortable fabric and extra pocket space. It's quite wide across the chest and the 'Aeroforce Soft-Touch' fabric is comfortable against the skin. It means there's less need for mesh fabric, and the white colour reflects the sun. The Cytech chamois is our gold standard of pad design for long-course comfort and, while it's fairly wide, it's not bothersome while running. The pockets are stitched into the back so can sag a little when fully loaded, but it's a negligible issue. This design is a limited edition suit, with a £10 levy added. racezone3.com

81% **VERDICT** PRICEY AND TECH-HEAVY WITH LONG-COURSE CRED



AROPEC LION

£44.99 The Lion is by far the cheapest here and it will serve you well for sprint-distance tri, but we wouldn't opt to use it for anything longer. The 'pad' is actually just a bit of fleece lining and offers little comfort for cycling, although you've nothing to weigh you down on the run. The thick silicon grippers aren't as comfortable as the thinner bands here, but they offer a secure enough fit. We were left chafe-free under our arms, although the zip housing didn't do enough to stop rubbing in the chest area. The Lion isn't without its compromises, but most of them are tolerable for a very affordable, entry-level suit. aropec.co.uk

72% **VERDICT** VERY INEXPENSIVE AND FINE FOR SHORT-COURSE



MEN'S VERDICT

There was a full spectrum of price points and tech on test here, proving that there's plenty of innovation and lifespan left in the vested tri-suit market. At the value end, Dhb's suit can't be beaten. It has identical features and build quality to suits a third more expensive. It's often even cheaper on Wiggle, but you're onto a winner at the RRP price as it stands.

While Aropec's suit will see you through a few races it just isn't quite up to the standard of the other suits on test, although it's not terrible by any means. We weren't thrilled by Orca's Core suit, and found Lusso's offering a better choice between the £75-£100 mark.

Huub's DS just edges Zone3 in the high-end techy suit battle due to its fabric quality and closer fit. But our Best on Test award goes to Manchester's Airofin. It's suitable for every race distance, including long-distance triathlon, is very breathable and the smart storage make it a great all-rounder. And at a sensible price, too.



LG PRO CARBON

£105 The LG Pro Carbon tri-suit has a snug but cosy fit and is compressive enough to wear without a bra. The laser cut fabric uses a mixture of compression carbon fibre mesh to increase blood circulation and the Coldblack fabric protects from UV rays. The tri-specific seam placement means there's no irritation from the stitching as the inner leg is seam-free. But the ventilated female-specific chamois is thin, the double pocket is minuscule and, despite the fabrics being scientifically impressive, it was dripping wet after a pool session. It would work in the heat, but it isn't an all-rounder and falls short of its £100+ price tag. garneau.com

78
%
VERDICT IMPRESSIVE TECH LET DOWN BY RACE DAY FLAWS



ZOOT LTD

£110 This suit is generous on sizing and the inner bra accommodates most bust sizes. The Italian fabric is quick drying while the racer-back style frees the shoulders for slick movement in the water even when the spacious pocket is full. The SeamLink stitching feels smooth against the skin to minimise the risk of chafing. The grippers on the thin leg hem stay put, and the SBR 2D chamois provides all-day comfort and ventilation; although the shorts could be longer. Zoot have combined their best components and styles and, for £110, it's a good investment for athletes who want a quality long-course suit. zootsports.com

95
%
VERDICT TICKS EVERY BOX FOR SERIOUS TRIATHLETES

220
TRIATHLON
BEST ON
TEST



DARE2TRI FRONT ZIP

£64.99 Positively, Dare2Tri's suit provides a quick-drying material that adds no drag in the water and the flatlock stitching is smooth against the skin (although the seam direction makes it restrictive around the shoulders, waist and legs). The anti-bacterial chamois has a good thickness, and the shorts are an ideal length and grip effectively, yet the hem is too tight around the quads and doesn't make for comfortable swimming or running. For those wanting a taste of triathlon, it ticks the box as a no-frills suit yet it lacks style. There are higher quality and more comfortable tri-suits tailored towards novices. dare2tri.eu

59
%
VERDICT DOES THE JOB ON A BUDGET, BUT SACRIFICES MOVEMENT



HUUB CORE

£129 The Huub Core is made from thermodynamic and Coldblack fabric, making it breathable and the quickest drying on test, plus it has UPF 30 protection. It glides through the water and the stretchy mesh on the hamstrings and waist make for impressive performance on the bike and run. The pockets are a good size for nutrition, but are still too high up to be easily reached. The vertical seams aren't restrictive, but it's too flimsy around the chest, low under the arms and let down by the internal bra. There are more resourceful tri-suits at a lower price than £130 out there, such as Huub's impressive Essential suit. huubdesign.com

75
%
VERDICT MATERIAL IS EXCEPTIONAL, COULD BE BETTER WAIST UP



ZONE3 ACTIVATE+

£85 The Activate+ is best suited for long-course racing, with a Tri-Lite female-specific pad providing a happy and supportive medium between bib-shorts and tri shorts. Despite the thin material, it moves with you, dries quickly, and provides a good size pocket. The inner bra offers substantial support for bigger busts, but it could provide more coverage under the arms, and the extra zip means it's not a speedy turnaround time if you need to take a loo break en-route. Zone3 pride themselves on style and high-quality material which is a good deal for £85, but it's not built for all body shapes. racezone3.com

79
%

VERDICT GREAT LONG-COURSE SUIT, BUT NOT FOR ALL BODY SHAPES



2XU PERFORM

£110 The new 2XU Perform may look basic, but the ICE X and SBR Power fabric deliver by drying quickly, protecting from UV rays, and feeling like an extra skin. This makes for a great long-course suit that doesn't add drag in the water and leaves your shoulders free from restriction, although we felt that the chamois could be thicker. The upper is supportive around the chest and the seams don't press any moving body parts, meaning maximum flexibility even when the two gel size pockets are full. The subtle patterns look good, and at £110, it's worth the investment for a classic and reliable 2XU product. 2xu.com

91
%

VERDICT ALL YOU WOULD EXPECT IN A PERFORMANCE SUIT



SPEEDO FASTSKIN

£80 Speedo have created the Endurance10 fabric, and it produces a quick-drying, compressing yet comfortable skinsuit. The Fastskin Proton glides through the water and stretches in the right places for the run, too, including a good size pocket without adding drag. The flexible chlorine resistant mesh on the back panel is ventilated for moisture management yet ensures your shoulders are free. The long shorts grip effectively, but the chamois could be thicker for longer distance triathlons. The seams for the pad, meanwhile, are too irritating against the skin and make for some discomfort along the way. speedo.com

80
%

VERDICT SMOOTH AS A SWIMSKIN AND GOOD SPEED FOR JUST £80



WOMEN'S VERDICT

For tri-suits it's all about finding one which fits seamlessly and becomes unnoticeable when you're in the zone. Whether it's for short- or long-course racing, the perfect tri-suit for women should feel compressive enough to be supportive, yet flexible enough to allow for movement in all directions.

The perfect tri-suit should allow you to concentrate on the race and become an extra skin on race day, and be worn in confidence – like putting on your armour to execute the best performance. For this reason, the 2XU Perform feels like wearing an old favourite: simple yet smooth and moulding to the shape of the body as you move.

We rate the Zone3 Activate highly for comfort and compression for long-course racing, and we feel the Speedo Fastskin is just that, with bags of speed and slickness. Huub and Louis Garneau have some good technical material, but the Zoot is our overall winner for ticking every box: comfort, style and performance.