



To the uninitiated water exercise may mean nothing more than bouncing around to pop music in a swimming pool at a water aerobics class, but what they may not realise is that the sport has developed into a scientifically-proven activity that is now just as popular with elite athletes as it is with people looking to shed a few kilos, attracting millions of participants worldwide.

Making a big splash

Water's relevance to our lives is unquestionable. It covers approximately 71% of the Earth's surface and makes up about 70% of the human body. It's also an obvious element for many sports such as swimming, ice hockey, water skiing, white water rafting, diving, rowing, sailing, and fishing, to name but a few! And, although the presence of water is essential to a wide array of activities, one sport that is becoming increasingly popular, aims to harness the full fitness-enhancing potential that water provides.

As water exercise, or aquatic training, is making a splash in sporting circles this has led to the development of some interesting products. Equipment designed specifically for aquatic training first began to appear on the market in the 1980s, and since then numerous companies have developed products ranging from basic buoyancy aids to high tech gadgets as the field of water exercise has gained in popularity. One area that is quickly expanding is deep water aqua running, where the body is suspended in deep water to shoulder level to allow you to breathe comfortably whilst literally running

 Aqua Running Ltd.



Aqua Jogger's products include belts, foot gear and DeltaBells.

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through the water. Although this first gained recognition in the USA, it is now being widely adopted in Europe, where one company believes it is on the verge of really taking off.

Supporting the product

Developed on the basis that the body weighs only 10% of its 'on land' weight in water, the patented Aqua Jogger is a soft, flexible chlorine-resistant foam buoyancy belt made from closed cell polyethylene material with EVA that keeps the 'runner's' head comfortably above water, thus allowing them to exercise without risking a strained muscle or exacerbating an injury. It is also available in numerous different versions to suit men, women and children of different body shapes and fitness levels. And, for a more demanding workout, the Aqua Jogger range now also includes DeltaBells EVA foam hand gear, which resemble triangular dumbbells, to increase water resistance and work on upper body strength whilst ensuring flotation support, and AquaRunners RX EVA foam foot gear to increase the intensity of a cardiovascular workout. This may sound like a fairly simple concept, and maybe it is, but the efficacy of the product in allowing people to train at any level and even when injured is impressive, and the biggest advocate in the UK is Terry Nelson, the founder of Aqua Running Ltd.

A former professional footballer with Liverpool FC, Nelson decided to set up his company after having used the Aqua Jogger himself. Having already had one kidney transplant and gone on to compete in the London Marathon and won gold medals in the 400m, 1,500m and the 5,000m at the British Transplant Games, Nelson was selected to run for Great Britain at the World Transplant Games in Vancouver, Canada, in 1993. However, disaster struck when he discovered that he had not only broken a metatarsal bone in his foot but that his body was rejecting the transplanted kidney. Determined not to be beaten, he began

to look around for a solution, and discovered the Aqua Jogger in a US magazine. Amazingly within six weeks his foot had healed and he was deemed fit to compete in the Games where he won gold and became the 5,000m World Transplant Champion.

He continued to use the product for the next 11 years while he waited for a second transplant and, as soon as he was well enough, Nelson set off around the world researching the range of aqua resistance equipment that was available, before setting up Aqua Running in June 2006.

Suited and booted

Aqua Running is the exclusive distributor in Europe for innovative deep water running brands Aqua Jogger and AQX, which includes the Zero Gravity Suit (ZGS) and the Aquatic Training Shoe (ATS). Made of neoprene covered



AQX's Aquatic Training Shoe uses three strategically placed medial and lateral plastic gills to enhance muscle usage.

 AQX



with a thin layer of Lycra, AQX's ZGS is not only said to help to maintain proper mechanics through the correct placement of the buoyant material, which is distributed in ten places according to hydrodynamic principles, it also provides a thermal barrier thus increasing comfort and performance, as 'warmer' muscles can decrease the likelihood of injury and increase caloric expenditure to dissipate heat. Some argue that it is more comfortable than wearing a belt as it allows a greater range of movement, thus enabling the wearer to perform vertical exercises simulating running and cross-country skiing, and then moving seamlessly to horizontal movements to swim-like motions, or abdominal crunches on your back, but, as with any sporting products, it is down to personal preference. There is, however, no doubting the innovative nature of the ATS.

Designed for use in both deep and shallow water, the ATS lifts aquatic training equipment into the sphere of highly technical products. Using three strategically placed medial and lateral plastic gills to enhance muscle usage, the ATS is a lace up shoe with a textile and synthetic leather upper and a moulded rubber sole with a raised design for grip. It is said to add 20-30% more resistance to leg movement patterns in the water when exercising at a medium pace, which stimulates more muscle groups in the lower body including the hamstrings, quads, hip flexors and glutes, and makes it possible to increase the intensity of the cardiovascular workout achieved, even to the high level demanded by elite athletes. If the people now using the Aqua Jogger and AQX goods are anything to go by, the products are a serious piece of equipment for serious athletes.

Top class clients

Aqua Running already boasts many big names amongst its clients including the England Rugby Football Union, Chelsea, Blackburn Rover, Aston Villa and Everton football clubs, the English Institute of Sport, the Great Britain Elite Marathon Runners, and the Royal Marines Commando Training Centre, to name a few. And it doesn't end there. Speaking to WSA, Nelson revealed that he recently met with the British Government's Health Secretary to discuss the possibility of incorporating Aqua Running's products into the school sports curriculum in an attempt to attack the overwhelming problem of childhood obesity that now exists in the UK.

With everyone—from children through elite athletes to the burgeoning group of active over-50s—now realising the benefits of aquatic exercise, in the not too distant future water may well become as vital a component in our sporting activities as it is to our very existence. 🌐

Swimming in science

Water is a near-perfect environment to exercise in as it leads to a more effective workout whilst also reducing the risk of injury. The resistance produced by the water itself makes the muscles work harder, but without any of the impact associated with exercising on land. It reduces the stress on joints, muscles, bones, tendons and ligaments and allows for a fuller range of movement than is possible on land. It also disperses body heat more efficiently than air, and makes it easier for the body to maintain a constant temperature, thus avoiding overheating. Furthermore, being in water produces physiological changes in your body that help to remove metabolic waste, improve cardiac function, lower blood pressure, and assist the body in tissue healing.

As a result of these advantages aquatic training appeals to a wide array of people. Professional athletes and amateur sportsmen and women began to use aquatic training following injury as it allows them to continue to train without exacerbating the problem through impact, but an ever-increasing number are now incorporating it into their regular training programmes. It has also been proved to ease back pain during pregnancy and some research even suggests that it has led to a reduction in the number of sick days taken by expectant mothers. But the demographic group that has arguably played the greatest role in boosting the sport into the mainstream is the millions of active 'over-50s' who have taken up the sport in order to keep moving and stay fit without the risk of straining joints or causing pain and injuries associated with the gym, etc. (weightlifting injuries increase 200-300% in women and men aged over 50). And they are more than ready to embrace water exercise as, according to Aqua Jogger, this group alone has increased demand for aquatic training by a staggering 40%.

Furthermore, as well as being popular, it actually works. According to a study carried out by researchers at The American College of Sports Medicine in 2002, involving women aged between 60 and 75 years, which reviewed the physiological responses of older women to a water-based exercise programme, aqua training resulted in a significant improvement in health-related fitness including muscle strength, oxygen uptake, flexibility, agility and loss of subcutaneous fat. 🌐



Ten foam pads incorporated into AQX's Zero Gravity Suit help to maintain proper mechanics and provide buoyancy.

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