

Serendipity: In Search of a Sustainable Exercise Routine

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Underwater technology to play music and lectures drowns out the boredom of working out in a pool.

I've finally found a sustainable exercise routine. I was a late convert to swimming, mostly because of my hair and the chlorine thing. But I knew it was a great all-around exercise, so I jumped in.



Karen Telleen-Lawton

For a few months, it was pleasant, if not exciting, but after awhile I began dreading the cold, wet and boredom. Then my alumni Web site joined iTunes' I-University, providing free downloadable lectures. In a flash of insight, I reasoned that if I were listening to an interesting lecture, I could cut the tedium.

It didn't take much online research to find that swimmers have been trying to solve the problem of workout boredom for years.

"We used to sell a Speedo FM Radio," said Steve Ruggles, owner of [Montecito Sports](#). "People were crazy for them even though they didn't work very well. They were just desperate to have something."

Then came iPods, MP3s, WMAs and who knows what else, and soon swimmers wanted these to perform underwater. Entrepreneurs got busy making waterproof cases,

waterproofing the devices and designing underwater technology with names such as SwimMan and Finis SwimP3.

After checking out the options online, I decided to try the SwimP3. The audio transmission technology involves conducting the music through the cheekbones. The advantage is that the speakers are held in snugly by goggles, without having to jam in earplugs. I have little ears for which earplugs never quite fit, so this is a plus.

Ruggles let me borrow his personal Finis SwimP3 for a swim test. “Your expectation shouldn’t be high,” he cautioned. “It has just two volume settings and could use more. It may not be loud enough to listen to a lecture.”

I took it to my pool of choice, the [Tennis Club of Santa Barbara](#), and listened to the action beats Ruggles already had uploaded. I found it pretty miraculous. The music was as clear as my new goggles. Splashing and external noise were not unduly intrusive. In fact, for a while a gardener was running a blower quite close to the pool, and the noise wasn’t enough to disrupt my listening.

The next test was listening to lectures. After some frustrating techno-hours, my son wrote up precise instructions on converting AAC files to MP3 and finding the converted files on my computer.

Back at the swim club, the summer crowd of children was thinning; I could almost imagine a nip of fall in the morning breeze. I tiptoed to the pool’s edge, hoping no one would recognize me in my outlandish gear: my daughter’s old swim team jacket over a faded swimsuit, a wrist brace, swim cap, goggles and the SwimP3 clamped on like electronic ear muffs.

It worked reasonably well. The words were clear when I swam the breast stroke and back stroke; it was just OK with freestyle. I can’t keep the drift of the lecture while

swimming the butterfly. If the lecturer has a soft voice or there's much unamplified audience participation, I can't keep the drift of the lecture.

Overall, the music and lectures definitely contribute to swimming's sustainability as exercise for me. Although I have to listen to lectures twice to really understand it, that's to be expected for multitasking. The Finis people suggested I wear earplugs for better sound control, but you know how I feel about earplugs.

Besides, if I have to add one more bit of gear, I might forget my bathing suit.

Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations supporting sustainability. Graze her writing and excerpts from Canyon Voices: the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon at www.canyonvoices.com.

