

English Channel Relay Swim 2008

"Fastest Relay Team 2008"

The Team: Dan Seagrove-Castle, Dominika Szucsova, Sophie Tills, Tessa Dunford, Danni Prior, Katie Brown, Dawn Bissett (Chaperone), Lee Wakeham (Coach)

The English Channel is one of the hardest swims in the world due to the cold water, sea conditions that can change within twenty minutes, flotsam, motsam, traffic, the tide and the unpredictable weather. After two hard months of training in Dover harbor, the team was ready to take on the English Channel. Mental and physical preparation consisted of short training sessions in the sea in low temperatures and varied conditions building up to two one and a half hour sessions back to back and some night swimming.

On the 30th July at 07:00 the team met at Dover Marina and after some final checks and good byes to parents they boarded the Ocean Breeze which was piloted by Dave Whyte and set off for Abbott's Cliff which is a small beach on the Folkestone side of Samphire Hoe. On arrival we were greeted by parents waiting in anticipation and waving from the beach. Dan entered the water from the boat and swam to the shore and cleared the water. At 07:58 the start signal was given and Dan re-entered the water to start the relay swim to France. The team would swim for one hour each in the same order until the last swimmer cleared the water again in France.

Dan started the swim at a very fast pace and on his second hour he actually swam faster at a stroke rate of 101 strokes per minute. This was an unusual sight for the crew who have been in the business for years and were pleasantly surprised as they always like a fast swim. All of the team swam exceptionally well in this completely new and some times scary environment. Sometimes having to swim through huge clumps of sea weed or finding that the boat was beside them on one breath and not so close or ahead of them on the next, or having to play catch up because of the tide pulling the boat and swimmer apart. Each and every one of the swimmers had their own experience in the water and all of them excelled and should be very proud of them selves.

We made fast progress across the Channel but could not see France until well over half way. As France broke through the haze it still seemed like we were making good progress until the land mass became so big that progress seemed to stop and the last two to three hours seemed like a life time and progress seemed too be painfully slow. Finally Tessa entered the water for her second hour and we told her that she could finish the swim if she swam hard. Tessa busted a gut but could not quite finish and Danni had to enter the water and on the observers signal had to overtake Tessa to finish the final 400 meters to clear the water on the sandy beach just under Cap Blanc Nez in a time of **10 hours 2 minutes** to take the fastest relay crossing time for 2008.

We were again greeted by some of the parents and family who had taken a ferry across the Channel to observe as much of the swim as they could from the French cliff tops. They had found our landing spot and welcomed the whole team ashore who were allowed to finish the final 200 meters behind Danni.

This was a text book swim with the weather gods on our side providing glorious sunshine and a flat sea for the duration with an added bonus of a visit from a small pod of dolphins.

Well done to you all. I am proud to have been part of the team.
Lee Wakeham
DLGC Open Water Secretary & Coach