



# F.E.M.S

## SWIMMING CLUB

### Newsletter

#### 2025 CHAMPS DURBAN

SAMS Swimming Championships  
Rachel Finlayson Swimming Pool

#### CLUB NITES

Social Swim Meet-Ups  
Last Friday of the Month

#### MEMBER'S ESCAPADES

Celebrating our members' Achievements

## SA SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS MARCH 2025



40th SA MASTERS SWIMMING  
CHAMPIONSHIPS  
DURBAN 2025



aQuellé



expand & design



40

This year's South African Masters Swimming Championships was held where they began, 40 years ago, at the Rachel Finlayson Swimming Pool on the Durban beachfront. The milestone event was held over four days and incorporated solo and relay pool events and an open water swim held at the Durban Undersea Club. The Fish Eagles Master Swimmers (FEMS) have returned tanned and elated at our achievements in Durban. Despite being one of the smaller clubs competing in the competition FEMS managed to break last year's record medal count of 54 to bring home 58 medals this year.



In total we won 11 gold, 25 silver and 22 bronze medals. Top medal winners were Jenny Sheeny (8), Jed Van Roon-Gifford (7), Niki Louw (6), Richard Hetem (5), Liz Louw (5), and Jill Black (5).

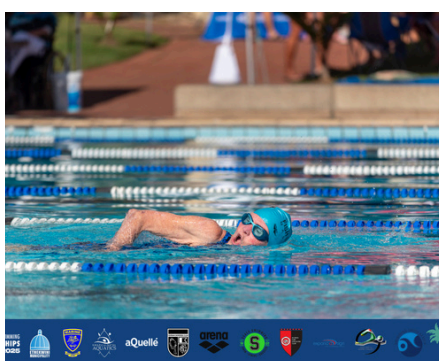
The 200m ladies relay team, made up by Jill Black, Natalie Hilbert, Niki Louw and Jenny Sheeny deserve a special mention for winning silver medals in the freestyle race, and bronze medals in the medley.

On the final day, a good number of FEMS swimmers participated in the early morning open water swim before returning to the pool to complete the final races of the competition. Jed van Roon-Gifford (1km) and Attie Louw (3km) won gold medals in their respective age groups, Amanda Wallace (3km) and Barbara Eckersley (1km) won silver medals, and Niki Louw (1km) won a bronze medal.

Another feather in FEMS' cap is the Spirit Bowl Award given to the team displaying the most team spirit. This award really honours the team's wonderful camaraderie, enthusiasm and mutual support. Thanks to the support of loved ones, family members and sponsors, the team was able to excel at these Championships.

"My first Masters Nationals was a most enjoyable personal challenge and blessing," said FEMS Chairperson, Rob Hetem. "I am also extremely proud to have accepted the baton from the Durban LoC and FEMS will be hosting this prestigious event in George next year."

There were 27 clubs participating in this year's Championships, all of varying sizes and from all over the country. Despite competing against clubs double and triple their size, FEMS also managed to score enough points for races participated in to maintain their standing in the top 6 clubs in the country.



A huge thank you to all the FEMS sponsors who contributed to swimming kit and expenses, especially John Dory's and Chris Olivier Construction.

The FEMS team would also like to thank everyone who made the Durban Champs possible, from the biggest to the smallest contribution.





## CLUB NITES

Our monthly Club Nites are an awesome opportunity to gather our swimming community together for some social swimming and training. Club Nites in the last quarter have been focused on gearing up for Champs in Durban. Our January theme was 'relays' - which were fast and competitive, while encouraging teamwork and camaraderie. In February we focused on 'starts and turns'. We have some incredible swimming coaches in our club and are grateful

that they are willing to pass on their valuable knowledge.

While Champs was fresh in everyone's minds, the March Club Nite followed a late afternoon swim and a special meeting and club dinner was held to discuss all that needs to be done to host Champs 2026 in George. We are excited that our members will be volunteering their time, expertise and energy to help make the event a great success.



## HONOURING A CLUB LEGEND

Buddy Borstlap is something of a legend amongst the Fish Eagle Masters Swimmers. He has been a part of FEMS since 2001, participating in numerous Masters events over the years, winning multiple medals, and smashing South African records along the way.

At the 2023 SA Champs he broke the 90-94 age group 100m backstroke record by a massive 30.1sec - a record which hadn't been beaten in 23 years.

And, while Buddy isn't competing as much nowadays, we are delighted when he joins us at functions and swims.

In January we held a tea in his honour, which was well attended by our swimmers. This gave us an opportunity to visit with Buddy, reminisce about days gone by, and learn so much from a wise man. He is an incredible example and inspiration to us all!





## MEMBER'S ESCAPADES

### Decathlon - Retha Rousseau

I heard about Deca while participating in the Canada Ultraman - another amazing challenge. A Deca is basically 10 Ironman competitions done consecutively. It is made up of a 38km swim, 1,800km cycle and 422km run and there are cut-off times for each discipline.

Not only is it physically brutal, but mentally too. You swim in a pool, length after length, right through the night, and cycle round after round of 5-8 km (depending on the venue of the particular event), and the same with the run of about

1-1.3 km each. This format is implemented so that participants are close to their crew, food, bath and bed, as well as for other logistical and safety reasons.

There are other challenges like weather (heat, wind, rain), blisters, sleep deprivation, sunburn, hunger, hydration and exhaustion which add to the mental stress. Wearing the correct clothing and eating and drinking enough are big challenges. It's tricky, but I love it!

The atmosphere and camaraderie between athletes is something I have not found anywhere else, especially because we are usually a small group - there are not too many crazies out there!

My first Deca was in Italy in September 2024. I was the 152nd person in the world to finish it and the first South African to do so. I am proud of my achievement and am looking forward to my 3rd one in June in Colmar, France. It's a huge blessing to be able to be active and enjoy challenges like these.

### Ultratriathlon South Africa - Retha Rousseau

I was the Chairperson of Legogote Villagers Marathon Club for 6 years and had always wanted to host a marathon - the opportunity never came. Then in 2023 at 02:15 in Mexico ticking off laps on a run it hit me - I am going to bring Deca to SA!

So as soon as I returned from Mexico I wrote to IUTA and applied and bought the exclusive rights to bring Deca to SA.

Before I knew it it was 5th March 2025 and I was nervously waiting for the first athlete to arrive! What a reunion! Shanda Hill, world Champion in the Triple Deca whom I had met in Mexico and raced with in Italy, arrived with Mikey and Brad Kelly, and then the rest of the athletes followed.





## MEMBER'S ESCAPADES

### Ultratriathlon South Africa - cont.

The event, the first of its kind on the African continent, started on Sunday 9th March with a 38km swim, followed by a 1,800km cycle and a 422km run.

9 of the 12 incredible humans who started the Deca finished it. Blayne Ponte was the first SA male to finish Deca on home soil. Three of the athletes that finished were South Africans and became numbers 180, 181 and 182 in the world to complete a Continuous Deca in the last 45 years.

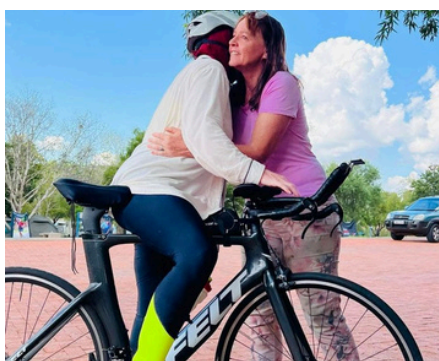
The atmosphere was magic. The camaraderie knew no bounds. I find it hard to describe. New friendships were formed and new personal boundaries achieved. For 14 days you share pain, laughs, fight fatigue and sleep deprivation, inspiring and willing each other on.

The event was such a success and 8 of the 12 athletes have already signed up for next year's race.

*To give back to sport after participating for 50 years opened up a new world for me personally and I loved every moment of it.*

Taking care of blisters, punctures and their all-round mental and emotional wellbeing was such a privilege and gave me so much joy. Being an extreme athlete myself, I understand the pain and suffering, and I know when to tell an athlete to sleep and when to give them tough love.

The resort catered for the event and the food was just outstanding. I treated the athletes to ice cream, popcorn, fruit salad, lollipops, spuds, etc. in between, and to see them enjoy the treats with such joy was such a pleasure. To experience this event from the "other side" was such a tremendous learning curve.



Please check out our website :  
[www.ultratisouthafrica.com](http://www.ultratisouthafrica.com)  
 FB Deca South Africa- The Big One.



## MEMBER'S ESCAPADES

### Red2Head

On 28<sup>th</sup> December 2024, FEMS members Amanda, Cliff, Annemarie and Gavin participated in the 5km Red2Head open water swim from the Red Bridge to Thesen Island in Knysna.

"I have been a FEMS member for 2 years now, participating mainly in

the open water swims. I am not a fast and furious swimmer but I have slowly started doing longer swims and challenging myself to swim through winter - even if it's just a quick 20 minute dip without a wetsuit in 16 degree water with my swimming buddy Daleen," says social swimmer Annemarie Buitendag.

"At the end of last year Amanda encouraged me to swim the Knysna tide assisted 5km swim. And I thought, 'Why not? It's time to challenge myself.' So I entered the race and except for the fact that the last kilometer didn't feel like I was swimming with the tide, I thoroughly enjoyed it and surprised myself completely."

### Môreson Mile

FEMS swimmers love participating in the annual Môreson Mile just before the SA Masters Champs takes place. It's a great opportunity to gauge fitness levels and take part in an organised race.

This annual fundraiser took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February at Island Lake. FEMS member, Richard Hetem, won the 350m Dash.

"I thoroughly enjoyed participating in the Môreson Mile. I think a mile is the perfect distance to see what the body is capable of and once you've done that mile, you know you are able to push more yourself even more." said Daleen Haarhoff.

Anita Flockhart trained for 6 weeks prior to the race as it was her first swim after a 26 year break from swimming. She attributes her inspiration to her swimming buddy, Judy Dixon.



## SA Biathlon Champs 2025

Our swimmers participate in various disciplines, often running, cycling and participating in various events.

One example of this is Amanda Wallace, Cliff Wallace and Mike McDonald who competed in the South African Biathlon Championships.

This event was held in Oudtshoorn on the 22nd of March and consisted of a 400m run and a 50m swim. The team did well, despite stiff

competition from the other major provinces and new, smaller districts such as Eden, Border and Boland taking part.

Amanda and Cliff came 5th and 8th respectively, and Mike won gold in his age group, beating his nemesis Archie Markgraaf.



This wasn't an overnight success, much time and hard work has been put into training to compete at the Biathlon Champs. Unfortunately, Gavin Gericke, another member of the FEMS team who also put in the hard work, had to withdraw due to illness.

Gavin and Cliff were also selected to represent Eden at the SA Triathlon Champs in PE on the 5th April, but were unable to attend due to other sport commitments.



## Medal Gathering Octogenarian



"I was very privileged and blessed to have a very good sporting season in the 80+ group.

At the SA Masters Swimming Championships I won 3 silver medals. At the beginning the biathlon season there was no 80+ group and we had to compete against 70-year olds!

At the Interprovincial Biathlon Champs I won a silver medal, and at the Eden Biathlon Champs a gold. For the SA Biathlon Champs an 80+ group was created, and I was fortunate to win a gold medal."

~Mike McDonald



## Swartvlei Crossing - Luigi Salemi

The "All-Weather Swimmers", a casual group of open water swimmers in Sedgfield, regularly swim in the Swartvlei Lagoon (Estuary) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.

Every now and then a member or two will organise casual afternoon swims too.

Occasionally, there are some more organised open water swimming events, such as the annual Swartvlei Crossing around the end of summer. This year it took place on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March, crossing the lagoon from west to east, a distance of about 4km.

This year's event was a downstream swim in the Hoogekraal River from the little concrete bridge on Hoogekraal Road 4,5km downstream to Outward Bound on the Swartvlei Lagoon.

It was a hugely fun event, with dramatically changing scenery ranging from very narrow riverine sections to the wide lagoon.

Within two hours everyone reached the destination, and the achievement was celebrated with carrot cake made by one of the swimmer's wives.



## Stilbaai 10km Tideglide Swim - Annemarie Buitendag

After doing the 5km Red2Head I got the opportunity to swim in this 10km swim. If I can do 5km, why not try 10km, right?

Held on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March in light rain, the water temperature was great, the tide played along and fortunately there was no wind. A friend kayaked alongside me in case I needed assistance, and had great fun watching all the "crazy" swimmers. One of the Sedgfield swimmers came out of the water with a crab on his head!

There were swimmer from across the Garden Route participating, including some from the Santos Seals open water swimmers and swimmers from Sedgfield .

This was a fun, social swim, but the locals went above and beyond to help and be part of the morning. A huge thank you to Steven and Bronwyn for encouraging the open water swimming community. And to Theo, all the way from KZN, thank you for inviting us all.





## 5150 - Gerrit Le Roux

My wife and I decided in November 2024 to enter the 5150 Triathlon on 29th March 2025 at Nelson Mandela Bay. Known as the 'fifty-one, fifty', its name refers to the total distance of 51,50km, comprising of 1,5km swim, 40km cycle and 10km run, in that order.

Being recreational swimmers, we needed to firstly get some swimming coaching and secondly do some open water swims. The training we received was critical to ensure we were comfortable enough in the water to face the open water swims. Unfortunately, one can hardly simulate the 'washing machine' effect when you enter the water with a multitude of other swimmers and the inevitable bumps and interruptions to your swim rhythm.

However, we are thankful that our preparation was sufficient to ensure we exited the water before the mandatory 55-minute cut-off, after which competitors are not allowed to continue with the bike and run portion.

The individual athletes (doing all three disciplines) started first and were followed by the relay team members (where each member only completes one discipline). This makes it an ideal event for those swimmers that want to gain experience in crowded open water swims but are not yet ready for the cycling and running part.

The 5150 included the Corporate Triathlon Challenge (CTC) where the total distance covered is 10% of the Ironman distance, making the

swim 380m, cycle 18km and run 4,2km. Also held in an individual or team relay format that starts shortly after the 5150, it is ideal for less active members to get their first taste of triathlon racing. It just so happens that the CTC was our first experience of triathlon about three years ago and that is where the seed was planted to become more active, but most importantly to become better swimmers because it is the first discipline and essential to set up for a good race.

The weather on the day played along and we were blessed with light winds, although coastal fog delayed the start of the triathlon. A residual swell with choppy conditions caused by strong winds the previous day made the swim challenging.

