

heads out with the Glenalbyn Masters on 2km and 3km swims from Seapoint to Windsurfers Pier from June to September, and occasionally in the winter. "Swimming is ideal for older women – there's a low risk of injury and the feel-good factor, particularly outdoors, is unbeatable. You get into a zone where you're literally one with nature and feel purely physical." Some of the women Lizanne swims with are well into their seventies and eighties and she sees them as role models. "Physiologically and psychologically, they are in their prime."

Crank that up a notch, if you dare, and you're talking about du and triathlons. Last year, it seemed everyone with school-leaving kids was taking up golf. This year, it's all about endurance training, which is exploding in popularity amongst 40- to 50-plus-year-olds. Maybe the recession is to blame – not just because the latter is a bit cheaper (although, initial kit will run to about €1,000), but because it's so empowering, as Mary Robinson would say. There are multiple races every month and clubs in literally every corner of the country. It's the fastest growing sport in the world.

Triathlete William Byrne, who owns Platinum Pilates in Stillorgan with his wife Milena (an ex-Riverview manager), says an older demographic is drawn to the sport because of the unparalleled sense of achievement you get after completing an event. "The rush is phenomenal and people also like the physique and physical power that come from mastering three sports as opposed to just concentrating on one. The cross discipline focus also minimises the risk of injury." Byrne recommends newcomers visit Wheelworx in Liffey Valley (the biggest bike shop in Europe), where they offer fantastic advice and starter packs.

In addition to the water and road training, many triathletes are integrating Pilates reformer workouts into their routines. William and Milena find that Pilates is also increasingly popular with "mature" cyclists from clubs like the Orwell Wheelers in Dundrum and golfers from The K Club, Milltown and Edmondstown. That makes sense considering how good it is for improving balance, control and posture, all of which can be casualties of ageing.

If there's a microtrend in fitness now, it's all about mixing it up and engineering new physical challenges that keep the synapses firing. The element of surprise inherent in doing something new will thrill your body and soul ... to the core. And enable you to have your fittest year yet. ■

JUST STARTING?

1 Kick off with a low key event like a duathlon (a run and cycle) and work your way up to a triathlon that starts with the swimming in a pool; www.duathlonireland.com.

2 If you want to take on marathon running and get to 26.3 miles, this is achievable even for the non-runner. You have plenty of time to train for the Dublin Marathon on October 31 this year, as long as you start training before April. Start by walking three times a week for up to 5km, then introduce jogging at intervals and put miles on the feet. Check www.dublinmarathon.ie for brilliant training plans.

3 You don't need expensive equipment, just good runners and comfortable clothing. There is a great race series of 5, 10, 15 and 20km runs all over Ireland organised specifically to prepare you for the big run.

4 Another great way to train for these events is to join an outdoor session like Fitsquad, which gives you the best of cardio, strength and endurance training. Working in groups gets you in the right frame of mind and really livens the concept of "the mind gives up before the body".

Kate Ryan, Fitsquad founder and instructor

“ IF THERE WAS ONE EVENT THAT I WOULD DO IN MY LIFE AGAIN, IT'S THE NEW YORK MARATHON IN NOVEMBER, IT'S ONE OF THE BEST SUPPORTED IN THE WORLD (OVER 2.5 MILLION SPECTATORS) AND IT'S A FANTASTIC WAY TO EXPERIENCE THE CITY. ”

Kate Ryan, Fitsquad founder and instructor



THE BOOT CAMP

If "boot camp" conjures visions of being bawled at by a brawny sergeant and endless push-ups on starvation rations, think again. Ian and Anna Bailey's weeklong weight loss and fitness regime in the Mourne Mountains combines his infectious passion for the outdoors and Anna's experience as a pharmacist with a special interest in nutrition for a feel-good experience with lasting results. It is difficult to imagine a better location for this: a *clachan* of cosy cottages with stunning mountain views and the magical Tollymore Forest Park, National Outdoor Centre, Castlewellan Lake and Newcastle beach all within walking/cycling distance. Of course, there will be pain, but also a well-devised range of fun activities and just enough delicious food cooked by local chefs to see you through. By the end of the week, I was astonished to find myself craving exercise for the first time in four decades. All six of us lost weight (an average of 3-4 kilos) and gratifying centimetres from our vital statistics, learned practical ways of eating healthily that actually work, and left toned-up and motivated. For a six-night reboot in a shared room, £800 all inclusive; 048 4377 0900; www.nibootcamp.co.uk.

Ruth Thorpe

TANK: €65; TROUSERS: €80; TRAINERS: €20; OPPOSITE PAGE JACKET: €450; TANK: €40; LEGGINGS: €140; BOOTS: €100; ALL STELLA MCCARTNEY FOR ADIDAS.