

# Hawkesbury swimming trio venture to the UK to swim the English Channel

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## Local News

Hawkesbury father and son Steve and Michael Payne, with friend Geoff Evans, recently traveled to the UK to swim the English Channel.

Steve's had booked it as a solo swim two years ago, but in June last year while swimming the Gibraltar Strait, between Spain and Morocco, he dislocated his shoulder causing him to undergo surgery on both shoulders in the end.



In England: (L to R) Geoff Evans, Paul Foreman (Boat Pilot), Michael Payne, Jason (Boat Crew), Steve Payne and Jason (CSPF Observer). Picture: Supplied

Despite requiring nine months out of the water, Steve was determined to make it to England and swim the channel, so he recruited his 17-year-old son and swimming partner of 12 years to join him on his swim.

The trio, named #Whatever, after Steve's swimming training group at Nepean Aquatic Centre, where all three swimmers are members, set off from Samphire Hoe, Dover on July 26.

They were guided by Paul Foreman who piloted the team's boat, Optimist, which Steve thought was appropriately-named.

"My son started swimming at 4:48 in the morning," said Steve. "It was cold, it was dark, it was cold, it was windy, it was cold. It was cold," he laughed.

"In a team in the Channel swim you have to do an hour each, so my son went first, Geoff went second, I went third.

"My son, he was the next swimmer. Whatever order you started with for your first hour, that's the order you have to do all day, so we just kept going until we ultimately reached the other side.

"It took 12 hours and 29 minutes. My son started and he also finished, it was pretty special for him.

"He's quite fast in open water so he set us up pretty well for the whole swim. Each time he got in he'd made massive inroads in our progress to France. The total distance that we swam was about 38.5 kilometres.

"The tide was smaller than usual but it still runs pretty strong and the wind was horrendous, so it was a really hard swim.

"Initially there was a light wind and it was choppy. From about the third to the fifth hour it had flattened out. But after that the wind just picked up and it was like a washing machine, it was really hard work. We earned it. We didn't really get blown off course, we got held up in one location longer than we had anticipated.

"We ended up further down the coast which is longer, not what it was supposed to be, generally it [the English Channel] is around 35 kilometres."

Steve has always been an endurance athlete and this was a dream of his. He first attempted to swim the English Channel in 2005 but was weathered-out in the solo crossing.

Ever since, he remained in channel swimming, but he hadn't attempted to tackle England again.

The trio are quite experienced at open water swimming having competed in different parts of the world.

"I did the Gibraltar Strait last year June 10," said Steve. "That was a 20-kilometre swim."

"I have also done Lake Zurich in Switzerland a couple of times. It is a 24.6 kilometre Freshwater swim at altitude. It is probably the most difficult swim I've done to date. I've done the Rottneest Channel in Western Australia six times as a soloist and once in a duo.

"My son's done Rottneest twice in a four-person team and once as a two-person team and has done exceptionally well over there.

"Geoff, he has done Rottneest as a soloist and various other swims ... he has had two attempts at a solo crossing of the English Channel so he has a bit of history over there."

Despite only training for the swim in the past three months they had plenty of preparation through their regular regimes, especially Michael who has been following in his dad's footsteps for the past three years.

"Since he was a kid he's always been swimming," said Steve. "In the last three years he's followed my footsteps and started doing open water swimming.

"He's been racing all around the state doing various open water swims and pool swimming but his coach over in Penrith ... Jackie she's changed his training regime ... to target open water.

"He has been working really hard on his open water skills and doing longer distances and so forth."

In the water: Geoff Evans joined his friends Steve and Michael Payne on their journey to England to swim the English Channel. Picture: Supplied

In preparation for the race over the past three months that all of the team could be in the water, Steve said, "In the pool we did a lot of long sessions: one-kilometre repeats or 800-metre repeats in maybe five or six sets, covering four or five kilometres at a time."

"We also did some ocean swimming and also some river swimming down here at North Richmond.

"As you can probably imagine it's quite cold in there this time of year," he laughed. "Some of the swims we did in the last week of June the water was down to around 12 degrees so it was very cold.

"My son didn't really like that but he realises the benefit I think now and he is pretty keen to keep doing it."

"It has been very challenging. I was working as hard as my shoulders would let me so it has been very hard but I never lost the chase.

"I always knew what I had to do and just stuck with it.

"I was inspired by my son, watching him train hard - if he could do it I could continue doing it, so I did everything I could, making sure we got to the start line in the best shape we could."

The Paynes aren't slowing down any time soon.

"I am planning on going back and doing the English Channel again in a couple of years' time, solo," said Steve.

"My son wants to do the Gibraltar Strait in two years and he also wants to swim the Tsugaru Strait in Japan.

"They are both part of the Oceans Seven, like there is seven summits, there are seven big swims in the world and my son is pretty keen to do some of those."