

# AMATEUR BENGALURU SWIMMERS TAKE ON GRUELING ENGLISH CHANNEL

A team of eight swimmers, between the ages of 31 and 72, are the only non-professional team from India to cross the Channel this year. Two-person relay team from the city becomes only Asian team to do the same

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A team of amateurs have achieved a feat that not many professionals can claim — to have successfully swum across the English Channel. The eight-member team from Bengaluru achieved this feat in 14 hours and 52 minutes. Take this into consideration — at most, around 300 people get a chance at crossing the English Channel each year, and only around 70% of those actually complete it. Fewer people have swum in the English Channel than climbed Mount Everest. “While the distance of the Channel (that links England and France) is 33 kms, thanks to choppy waters, the team ended up swimming nearly double the distance — 61 kms,” says a proud M Satish Kumar, an Ekalavya Award recipient, who coached the team. “This is the only amateur team from India (apart from a team that I coached in 2015) to have crossed the Channel,” he adds.



CHAMPS:

(Clockwise from left) Vani Embar, Prakash Hegde, Ravi Sandesh GR, Mohan Rao L, BR Gopal Rao, Sudheer, Siddhartha Agarwal, Shreyas M Sati and Aruna Venugopal



The team of eight swimmers after successfully crossing the Channel

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**Only amateur team from India to cross the Channel**

**AN AVERAGE AGE OF 50**

The eight members of the team — six men and two women — are from different walks of life, with an average age of 50. Yes, 50! While the youngest, Shreyas M Sati is 31, veteran BR Gopal Rao is 72. So, how did this motley crew come together? “We made a successful attempt in 2015 at crossing the Channel with an amateur team, and

there were many who didn’t get a chance to compete then. So, they got a chance this time. Others who were interested, like Vani Embar, Aruna Venugopal and Prakash Hegde, also came onboard,” says Satish. For Gopal, it was the fulfilling of a 15-year-long dream. “I feel like I have achieved my goal. I have been swimming since 1957 and have wanted to swim across the Channel for 15 years. I can’t put into words how happy I am; this is a lifetime achievement for me,” he says.

## 18 MONTHS OF INTENSE PRACTICE

On June 22, the team of eight swam from 6 am to 8.52 pm in the Channeleach member swimming for an hour at a go. Despite it being summer, the temperature of the water was 13°C; in Bengaluru, they were used to swimming in over 20°C. Simulation, therefore, was a big part of the training process, which was spread over 18 months. Hypothermia, sea sickness and muscle cramps are some of the issues that even seasoned swimmers face. So, part of the training included going on six-hour-long boat rides in Mangaluru for three days (to get used to seasickness), training at several lakes and swimming in Nainital (to get used to the cold water). “Each swimmer also spent five minutes at a go in a tank filled with 50-60 kgs of ice near the pool in Bengaluru to get used to the near-freezing waters of the Channel,” says Satish.

## COLD WATER, SEA SICKNESS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES

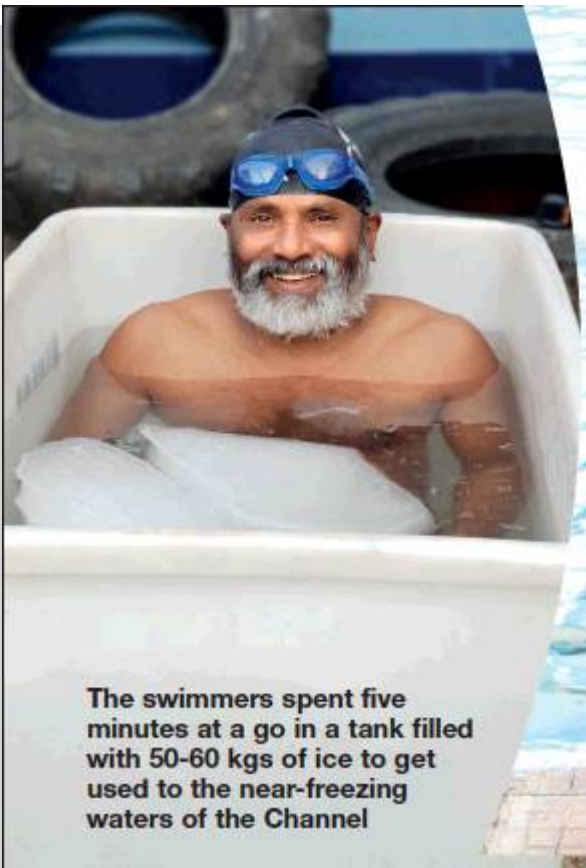
Although the simulation training was a boon, most team members say swimming in the cold water and seasickness were the biggest challenges. The swimming itself, they say, was a breeze. “The biggest challenge for me was jumping into the cold water, because it was a sudden shock to the body. Then, once we were out of the water, we had to face the cold again. While swimming, you end up drinking a lot of sea water, which leads to vomiting. The boat that we were on was very small, so your heads were spinning thanks to the choppy waters,” says Vani. While ensuring that he didn’t get bored and completed his one-hour swimming stretch swiftly was a challenge for Siddhartha Agarwal, Sudheer had his task cutout for him while swimming amidst jellyfish. And for Prakash, the anxiety of actually completing the swim was something that he had to overcome. “You can only swim if the weather permits, so we were waiting for eight days without even knowing if we will get a chance to swim. Barely 30% people who do swim complete the relay, so that also plays on your mind,” says Prakash. Nothing bothered Mohan Rao L, however, which he credits to the meticulously planned training sessions.



The swimmers spent five minutes at a go in a tank filled with 50-60 kgs of ice to get used to the near-freezing waters of the Channel

**BOTTOM ROW:** Sudheer, Ravi Sandesh GR, Satish Kumar and Shreyas M Sati  
**MIDDLE ROW:** BR Gopal Rao, Mohan Rao L, Vani Embar, Prakash Hegde and Aruna Venugopal  
**TOP ROW:** Siddhartha Agarwal

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# FIRST ASIAN TEAM TO COMPLETE TWO-PERSON RELAY

The celebration was doubled for the team of swimmers from Bengaluru, as two more swimmers — Ravi Sandesh GR and Srikanth Vishwanathan — became the first Asian team and the 25th in the world to complete the two-person relay across the English Channel. How difficult was it to complete a distance between two people that a team of eight did? “I swam for seven hours, while Srikanth swam for around six hours. When we started the swim, the sea was calm, but as we got closer to the French coast, the tides started getting high and began hitting us, and the wind also started blowing hard. Closer to the finish, we were very

tired and our arms started hurting. But we kept



Swimming was a breeze for the team, but swimming in the cold waters of the English Channel was anything but

our focus and covered the distance in 13 hours and 40 minutes,” says a beaming Ravi. Srikanth is still in the UK, gearing up for a solo swim next month.

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WHILE THE



DISTANCE OF THE CHANNEL (THAT LINKS ENGLAND AND FRANCE) IS 33 KMS, THANKS TO CHOPPY WATERS, THE TEAM ENDED UP SWIMMING NEARLY DOUBLE THE DISTANCE — 61 KMS

— M Satish Kumar, coach