

Eva Buzo, the ultra-marathon swimming legend!

Interviewed by Gina Edwards and Talitha Fishburn

In mid-Europe's mid-summer, Eva Buzo from Black Chambers took a splash... for 25 hours and 19 minutes of solo swimming traversing 58 km of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. The famed English Channel is 33km, so her attempt was the equivalent of two back-to-back English Channels. Official records declare Eva's swim duration to be the 121st longest ever completed by man or woman! Gina Edwards and Talitha Fishburn interviewed Eva about her phenomenal challenge and inspiring achievement.

Bar News (BN): Tell us about this incredible challenge...

Eva Buzo(EB): At 5pm on 13 July 2022, I entered the water of Lake Geneva close to Chateau Chillon, near Montreux in Switzerland. My destination was Bains des Pâquis in Geneva. A mere 69km away..! Only a handful of people have ever met the challenge in recorded history.

Lake Geneva is the largest body of water in Switzerland. It forms a border with France. It is the shape of a crescent with the horns pointing south. Despite being a deep alpine lake, the surface water temperature was positively balmy in July this year; about 22 degrees. Wetsuits aren't permitted in regulated marathon swimming, so it was just me and my togs, plus my cap and goggles!

Joining me from my first to last stroke was my support crew, including my mum, who sailed next to me on a small yacht.

I started in the evening to get the night swim out of the way first. I'm glad I did because it was a beautiful calm night and coincided with the full moon shimmering reflections over the lake.

About three or four hours in, around sunset, I was swimming ahead of pace. I had planned to hold 3km/hr but due to kind initial conditions I was sitting on 3.4km/hr. Despite this, at this point my body, wasn't feeling great. Two weeks earlier, I had injured my back lifting some boxes. I was feeling it! I started to doubt whether I had another 21 hours to give. I distinctly remember my body craving to put my feet on solid ground. But I pushed through these thoughts. After a few more hours of stroke after stroke, my body seemed to get the message



that I was in the water to stay. I eventually settled in and began to feel more comfortable. At that point it was probably around midnight and Switzerland was certainly asleep but for me and my wonderful support crew gliding across this majestic moonlit lake.

After a few more hours, I noticed colours in the sky emerge signalling morning. It was the beginning of what would be a scorching hot day. At its height, the temperature reached about 35 degrees. I felt guilty on account of my support team roasting on their boat while I was in relative comfort in the water! Though around 3 a.m., I recall my body started to shiver for a couple of hours.

By late morning, I was navigating the turn in the lake and the city of Geneva became visible. But it was bittersweet. Although I could see my final destination, at about that point, I had turned into an unrelenting headwind which was about 8 knots. This caused my pace to drop to around 2km/hr. I battled this headwind for about eight hours. While my stroke rate remained constant, my pace dropped to 1km/hr.

Eventually, I was about 11km from my Geneva destination. Normally this would take me about three hours to swim. But unfortunately the windy conditions were not easing. Nor were they predicted to ease any time soon. Instead, in those conditions, and based on my pace, I was looking at a further 11 hours to complete the swim including swimming another night. Completing the full solo 69 km challenge was now significantly 'off plan.' I had hoped to finish

in under 24 hours. I had planned to be swimming for 30 hours. But swimming for 36 hours was never on the cards. So at 25 hrs and 19mins, I decided to call it in.

This means that instead of being the eighth person to ever swim the 69 km from Chateau Chillon to Bains des Pâquis, I'm the first person in the world (as far as records indicate) to swim 58 km from Chateau Chillon to Hermance! Glass half full!

BN: What about breaks? Were there any?

EB: Every 75 minutes I paused for a small feed; alternating between a Vegemite sandwich and rice soup. Aside from that I was swimming. I was not permitted to touch anyone or the boat. Even my food supplies had to be lowered down to me.

BN: How do you prepare for such a swim?

EB: I have been a keen long distance swimmer for a while. As at January 2022, I was swimming 20 to 30 km a week and had been for about two years (both pool and the ocean). In the six months leading up to the Lake Geneva challenge, I was doing a two hour swim four days a week and then a three to five hour swim on the weekend amounting to 40 to 50 km a week.

I also did a qualifying swim in March 2022 where I swam back-to-back Derwent River runs, amounting to 75 km over two days. I had done lots of informal swims, but due to COVID-19, official swims had mostly all been cancelled for the last couple of years.

BN: *How did you mentally prepare for this swim?*

EB: I have the most wonderful coach, Vlad Mravac or 'Vladswim' and that was important. You need someone you can trust to go on the journey with you. Having not done something of this length before, I didn't know what it felt like to be 'ready.' I would sometimes fret and think, 'How on earth (specifically in water) am I going to do this?' But part of the process is you want to make sure you time your training so you don't lose motivation. You're not meant to be ready three months out because it's not game day at that point. Ultimately, you just need to trust the process your coach has planned for you and take it one training session at a time. And it turns out Vlad was right. We got to the day and I was absolutely ready for it.

BN: *Have you always been a keen swimmer?*

EB: Absolutely. Growing up, my life revolved around swimming and Wanda Surf Life Saving Club. I trained twice a day and the remainder of the day I was at the beach with a bit of school somewhere in between. I reached quite a high level with my swimming and water polo but stopped competitive swimming as a teenager. I took it up again in the last few years after being inspired by the 'Vladswim' ultra-marathon swimmers in Sydney who train at ABC pool and Coogee.

BN: *Do you relate your experiences with Big Swimming to your professional life, if so, how?*

EB: There are personality characteristics that carry across both fields. Personal discipline and determination are central to both my professional and swimming pursuits.

My main area of legal practice is international criminal law. I am the executive director of an organisation called Victim

Advocates International which represents victims of crimes against humanity and genocide in international courts where cases last for several years.

Swimming is also a great release for me and helps me regenerate. There's a confidence I get from time in the water that grounds me as I go about my work.

BN: *What reflections or insights have you taken from the swim?*

EB: The support I received from people, far and wide, was incredible and so motivating. In the lead up to the swim, it can be difficult to decide who or how many people to tell, because it creates that extra pressure and expectation which can impact your mental preparation.

I certainly never expected the high level of interest and support I received on the day. I was quite overwhelmed by and very grateful for the support. I had lots of messages coming in via a WhatsApp group of about 100 people (friends, family, colleagues, and even clients of mine from the Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh). I had messages of support coming in around the clock from all time zones! When the swim started to get difficult, my support crew shared the messages with me by holding up the messages in large writing on paper so I could read them as I swam.

I still feel quite emotional when I read back over the chat record. It's made me conscious of the fact that while maybe we *can* do these seemingly solitary things, it's so much better to invite people in to share the experience.

On a technical side, I think I could have reached Bains des Pâquis if I had been better prepared mentally. When I landed on solid ground my friends were there with champagne and we sat in the park and had a short victory party before I went home to rest.

It wasn't that my body was completely spent. My body was in relatively good form, but I was mentally exhausted from the change of plan that played out during the challenge. The Marathon Swimming Federation database of swimming records my time of 25 hours and 19 minutes as the 121st longest swim by a person (man or woman). Had I gone for 36 hours, it would have been in the top 30 longest swims of all time, so I'm ok with the fact I wasn't ready to make that leap on spec!

Ultimately, I'm thrilled with the experience and I loved every moment of it, including the preparation. I'm only 36 and I want to have a long and exciting ultramarathon swimming career so I feel it was important that my first significant swim over 24 hours was a positive experience that leaves me hungry for more – despite the dangling temptation to tackle the last 11 km.

BN: *What is your next swim?*

EB: In July 2023, I aim to become the first documented person to swim from Italy to Albania. My grandfather was from Albania and I still have family there, so it will be an incredibly special achievement to accomplish this goal. I tackled the Lake Geneva swim in preparation for the Italy to Albania swim because it is a similar distance. The route is 70km and *should* take around 24 hours as well. But I will be sure to set my head for 40! By hook or crook, I'm going to finish that crossing.

Because I'm the first to attempt to do this as an official swim, I need to build the swim from scratch. To pull this off it will all up cost \$25,000 including the boat hire, support crew, observers. If anyone would like to support they can support my *Go Fund Me* here:

First Documented Swim from Italy to Albania 70km <https://gofund.me/ee6d1d2f> **BN**

