**INNOVATIVE BEARDCAP IS CREATED FOR THE BEARDED NATION**

Virgin Trains has launched an innovative swim cap for bearded men – the Beard Cap - which will be trialled with customers competing at the Great North Swim, Lake Windermere, June 12 – 14, 2015. The unique Lycra prototype extends down to wrap under the chin and packs the beard against the face to decrease drag whilst swimming. It’s reusable, adjustable and perfect for keeping bushy beards under control.

Responding to debates on swimming forums about big beards causing drag, the rail operator and official train partner to the Great North Swim commissioned its own research\*. The findings revealed that over one in ten men (12 per cent) connected their beard to slower swim times, and nearly a quarter of men feel their beards hinder their sports performance. This could be because beards are an irritant for some sporting men (11 per cent), a source of discomfort for others (32 per cent) and a distraction for even more (42 per cent).

Virgin Trains expects the caps to be snapped up, as nearly half (46 per cent) of British men surveyed are now shunning the clean shaved look for something more hairy, and 22 per cent are opting for a big or thick beard. This is despite many (58 per cent) becoming annoyed with their furry faces.

However, it’s not all bad news because over a third of women prefer men with beards (37 per cent) with many women aged 25-34 preferring men with a hairy face (55 per cent), even though some men (29 per cent) find their beards get in the way of kissing.

Adrian Varma, Senior Partnerships and Marketing Manager at Virgin Trains, said: “At Virgin Trains we’re passionate about giving our customers the most awesome experience possible, and this extends to their sporting endeavours as they are travelling to the Great North Swim with us. In addition to the 50 per cent discounted tickets to the event for spectators and competitors, we’re delighted to be offering customers this innovative cap to help them do their best.”

Alex Jackson, event director at Great North Swim said: “As a newly bearded man, who is also a keen swimmer, I can empathise! We’re sure our swimmers will appreciate the efforts Virgin Trains has gone to and perhaps the Beard Cap will solve the problem of ‘facial hair-drag’ and encourage more guys to suit up and take the plunge in 2015!”

To find out more information and buy discounted tickets to travel to The Great North Swim visit <http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/nova/>

ENDS

Notes to editors

\*National Representative - Censuswide Survey completed by 2000 people in May 2015

Top 10 cities with the most bearded men in the UK:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| City | % of men currently with beards |
| Birmingham | 51 |
| London | 50 |
| Norwich | 49 |
| Leeds | 47 |
| Nottingham | 46 |
| Manchester | 45 |
| Brighton | 43 |
| Liverpool | 41 |
| Bristol | 41 |
| Edinburgh | 40 |

Inspiration has come from all corners of popular culture with ZZ Top, Brian Blessed and even Noel Edmunds voted as top celebrity beard idols voted by those who admitting to having one.

1. ZZ Top (11%)
2. Brian Blessed (9%)
3. Noel Edmunds (8%)
4. David Beckham (8%)
5. Father Christmas (6%)

For swimmers, spectators and supporters planning a weekend away to the Lakes during the Great North Swim, there are three exclusive discounts across Virgin Trains First and Standard Advance Fare tickets available – 20 per cent off for one person, 34 per cent for two people and 50 per cent for groups between three to nine people. To find out more information and buy tickets to travel to The Great North Swim visit <http://www.virgintrains.co.uk/nova/>

**About Virgin Trains**

Virgin Trains is the brand name of Virgin Rail Group (VRG), which is owned by Virgin Group (51%) and Stagecoach (49%). Virgin Trains has operated the West Coast passenger train franchise since 1997, serving key UK cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. In June 2014 the Department for Transport (DfT) awarded VRG a new franchise until at least April 2017.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. We provide the most frequent long-distance rail service in Europe (London - Manchester and London – Birmingham, both every 20 minutes).

Since 1997, Virgin Trains has introduced over 70 new trains at a cost of £1.5 billion. The service carries more than 34.5 million passengers a year and Virgin Trains employs approximately 3,290 staff.

Virgin Trains customers consistently rate the company as one of the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Passenger Survey (NPS) commissioned by industry watchdog “Passenger Focus”.

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