THE MARATHON ISSUE

MEN'S Running

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MAY 2016 – £4.50

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BECOME A MARATHON MAN

Our guide to the perfect race

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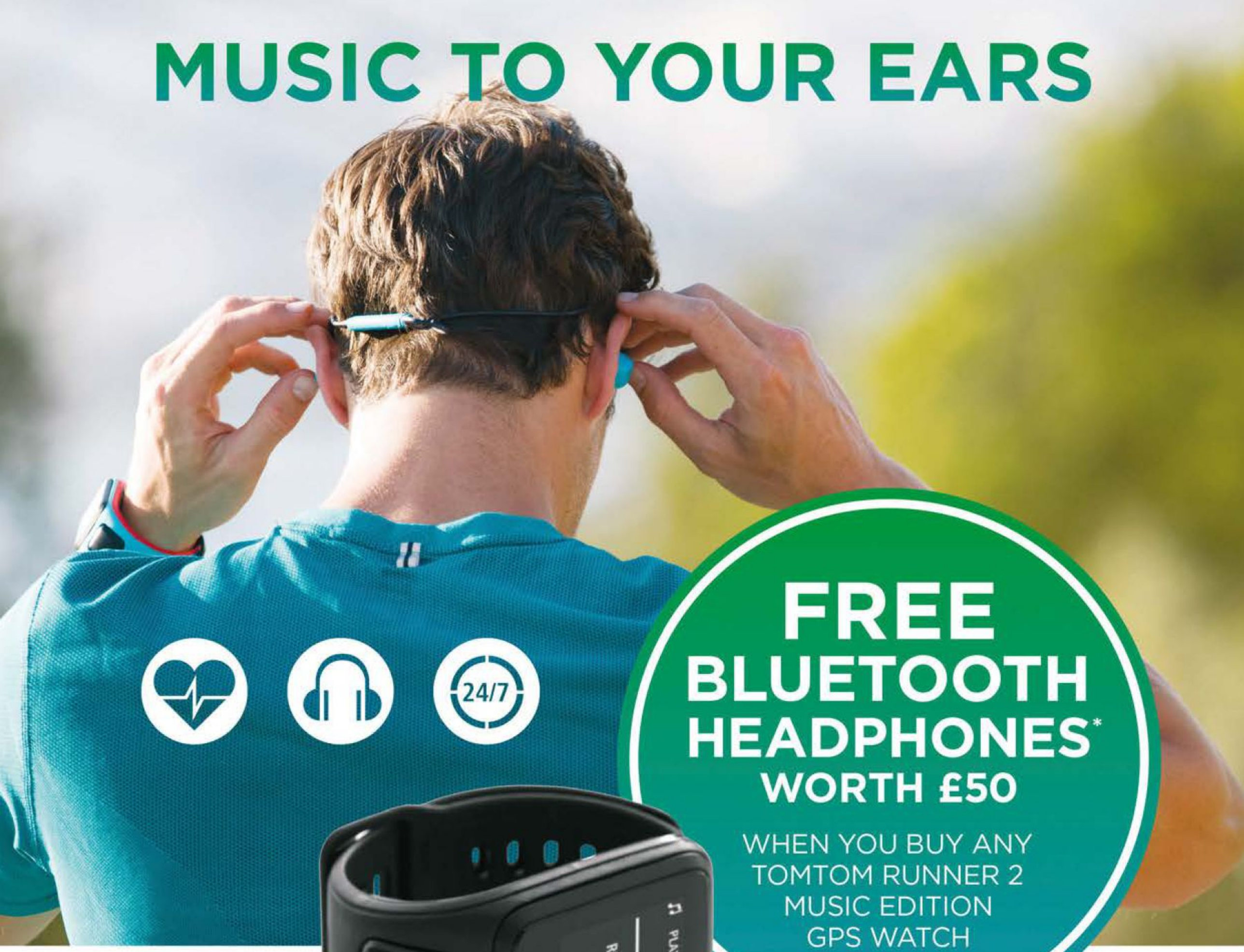

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EDITOR'S LETTER

TIME FOR 26.2

"If you want to win something, run 100 metres; if you want to experience something, run a marathon." So spoke Czech distance legend Emil Zátopek, still the only person to have won the 5,000m, 10,000m and Marathon at a single Olympic Games.

This issue, we turn our attention to the 26.2-mile distance. And what better place to start than with Pheidippides, the legendary Greek foot messenger who inspired the modern marathon? On page 50, we tell his incredible story.

The marathon boasts many modern-day heroes, too, and we speak with two of them. Couch potato turned distance don Steve Way explains why, for him, the marathon is a magical distance, and six-time London Marathon wheelchair champ David Weir talks about what it takes to get to the top.

In the build-up to the big day, many men fall victim to 'maranoia': the pre-race anxiety that convinces runners they are injured, undertrained or unwell. On page 60, three *MR* readers and this red-faced editor recall the (entirely imagined) pre-race ailments that have threatened to derail their previous marathon attempts.

Speaking of which, I think I just felt my achilles go. Quick! Someone call a doctor...

Rick

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MARTIN YELLING
A leading authority on the 26.2-mile distance, Martin offers his advice on how to arrive at the marathon start line in the form of your life (p46).

ROBBIE BRITTON
Ultrarunner Robbie puts on his snowshoes and heads north to Sweden's Ice Ultra, a 230K race over mountains and frozen lakes (p90).

JIM OLD
Devoted dad Jim discovers to his dismay that his offspring care little for his PBs. On p98, he asks: could the kids be on to something?

MAY 2016

MEN'S Running READ THIS, RUN BETTER

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Cover photo Jason Evans **Location** Providence, RI
Cover model Dylan Karten **Clothing** New Balance

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see page 38 for details

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STAR LETTER

GENDER EQUALITY

After reading the excellent article by Laura Fountain on being 'chicked' in your April issue, I wanted to give you an alternative response from a male angle.

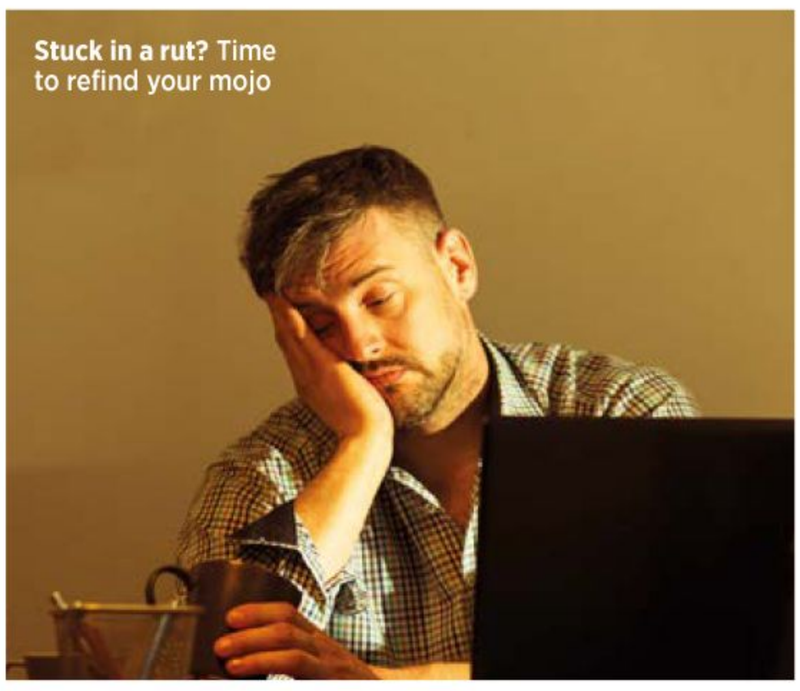
I joined my local running club, Pudsey Pacers, around five years ago, and would say that most of my closest friends in the club are ladies. As a 53-year-old runner, I have found that my closest rivals all tend to be ladies in their early forties.

Over the years, I have competed with them as club colleagues and against them as close rivals. I never consider that I have been 'chicked' when they finish in front of me, as they often do. Nor do I have any male pride in finishing ahead of them. Of course we always want to beat each other, but that's because we are colleagues and equals. Gender does not make any difference, as far as I am concerned.
Andrew Smithurst, West Yorkshire

Editor: Good on you, Andrew. During several races, I've found myself running alongside the first female – it's an honour as I'm never going to be running alongside the first male – and I feel absolutely no shame when she usually beats me. Let the best man or woman win, I say.

WORTH £125

The writer of this month's star letter receives a Soar Running Gilet, worth £125. Lightweight, stylish and rainproof, the gilet is perfect for running in unpredictable weather **soarrunning.com**



Stuck in a rut? Time to refind your mojo

WHERE'S MY MOTIVATION?

I'm officially in a running rut. Some of this is not my fault: a nasty bout of plantar fasciitis sidelined me for a month, and my fitness and motivation suffered as a result. I'm lucky in that I'm naturally slim, but I'm still feeling some low-level guilt about bunking off running. How can I get my mojo back?
Mark Bull, London

Editor: Everyone's motivation comes and goes, Mark. My advice is to sign up for a race: that way, you'll have a reason to start running again. Also, consider mixing up your runs. I'm a big fan of point-to-point runs on scenic trails. For me, running from A to B is far more motivating than running in a big loop. Give it a try and see if it works for you.

YOUR BODY KNOWS BEST

I just wanted to share a precautionary note to all your readers in training for their first marathon: don't overdo it! I'm halfway through my own training plan – and all was going swimmingly until I got too excited, didn't rest up enough, and ended up tweaking my achilles. I'm hopeful it's nothing too serious, but from here on out I'm going to listen to my body, not the generic training plan I printed off the internet.
Tom Kingsbury, Brighton

Editor: Marathon training is such a fine balance: do too little and you'll feel underprepared; do too much and risk getting injured. Your new approach is spot-on – listen closely to your body and know when it's time to back off. Good luck!

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

@reluctant jones A perfect day off. Other coffee shops are available, but not other magazines!

@skyblue_boy Me at mile 11 of Coventry Half Marathon and my son showing me how it should be done

@PeakNavigation Was great to have Rick from @mensrunninguk on one of our courses recently. Read about his experiences in the latest edition!

@lazygirlrunning Oh look it's me, a lady-person, in @mensrunninguk being all opiniony!

@Jakrunner1 Malta Marathon completed. 3hrs 45mins. Not what I wanted but hot, hilly & windy #BigMarathonChallenge

@TobiasMews Thrilled @mensrunning have used extracts from my book!

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The Coastal Challenge, Costa Rica

Ultrarunner Damian Hall makes his way across white sands during the multi-day ultramarathon in Costa Rica, which has an elevation gain of more than 34,000ft.
thecoastalchallenge.com

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Want to get involved? Check out the Fix Events 2016 Diary to find a race. Visit **thefixevents.com** for further information or to book online.

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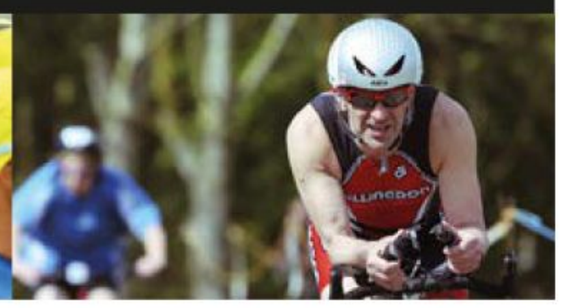

FIX EVENTS 2016 DIARY

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DATES	EVENT
APRIL	
Sat 2 April	Richmond Park Race 3: 5K & 10K
Sat 23 April	Richmond Park Race 4: 5K & 10K
MAY	
Sat 14 May	All Nations Triathlon
Sat 14 May	All Nations 5K & 10K
Sat 14 May	Battle of the Boroughs London
Sat 28 May	Richmond Park Race 5: 5K & 10K
JUNE	
Sat 18 June	Richmond Park Race 6: 5K & 10K
JULY	
Thu 7 July	Cardiff Corporate Run Challenge
Sat 16 July	Fix Active Summer Triathlon
Sat 16 July	Fix Active Summer 5K & 10K
Sat 23 July	Richmond Summer Riverside Run
SEPTEMBER	
Sat 3 Sept	Richmond Park Race 7: 5K & 10K
Sat 10 Sept	TRI Challenge
Wed 21 Sept	City Wharf 5K Run
OCTOBER	
Sat 1 Oct	Richmond Park Race 8: 5K & 10K
Sat 22 Oct	Richmond Riverside 10K
NOVEMBER	
Various dates	MoRunning: 17 locations across the UK and Ireland

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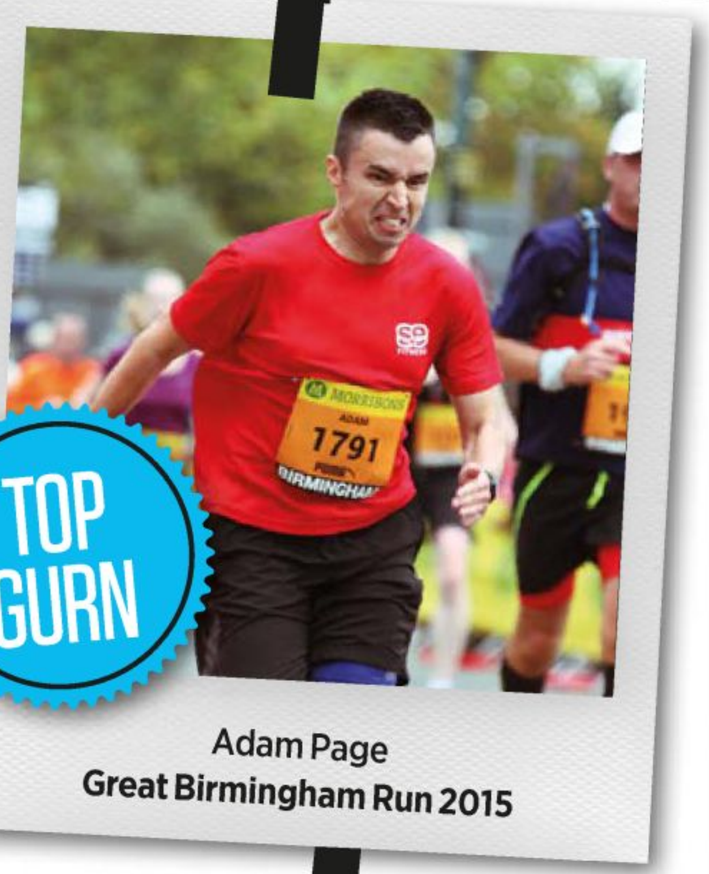
MY RACE FACE

Races are not catwalks – which is lucky, because few of us look good coming down the home straight. Here's a selection of some of your best/worst race faces



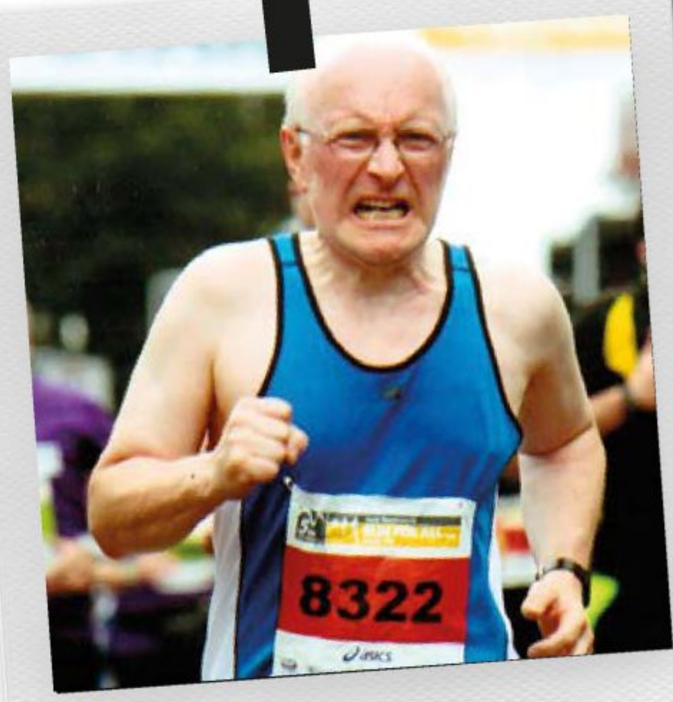
Adam Page
Great Birmingham Run 2015

Callum Gillett
BUCS Duathlon

James Brydon
Cornwall Fire & Rescue Half Marathon

Mark Foulger
Hull parkrun

Matt Powell
Kingsbury Water parkrun



Stephen Granville
Jane Tomlinson 5K Leeds

Adam wins a 'Doggie Bag' from skincare brand Bulldog for all his grooming needs **meetthebulldog.com**

Want to share your Race Face?
email mensrunning@wildbunchmedia.co.uk

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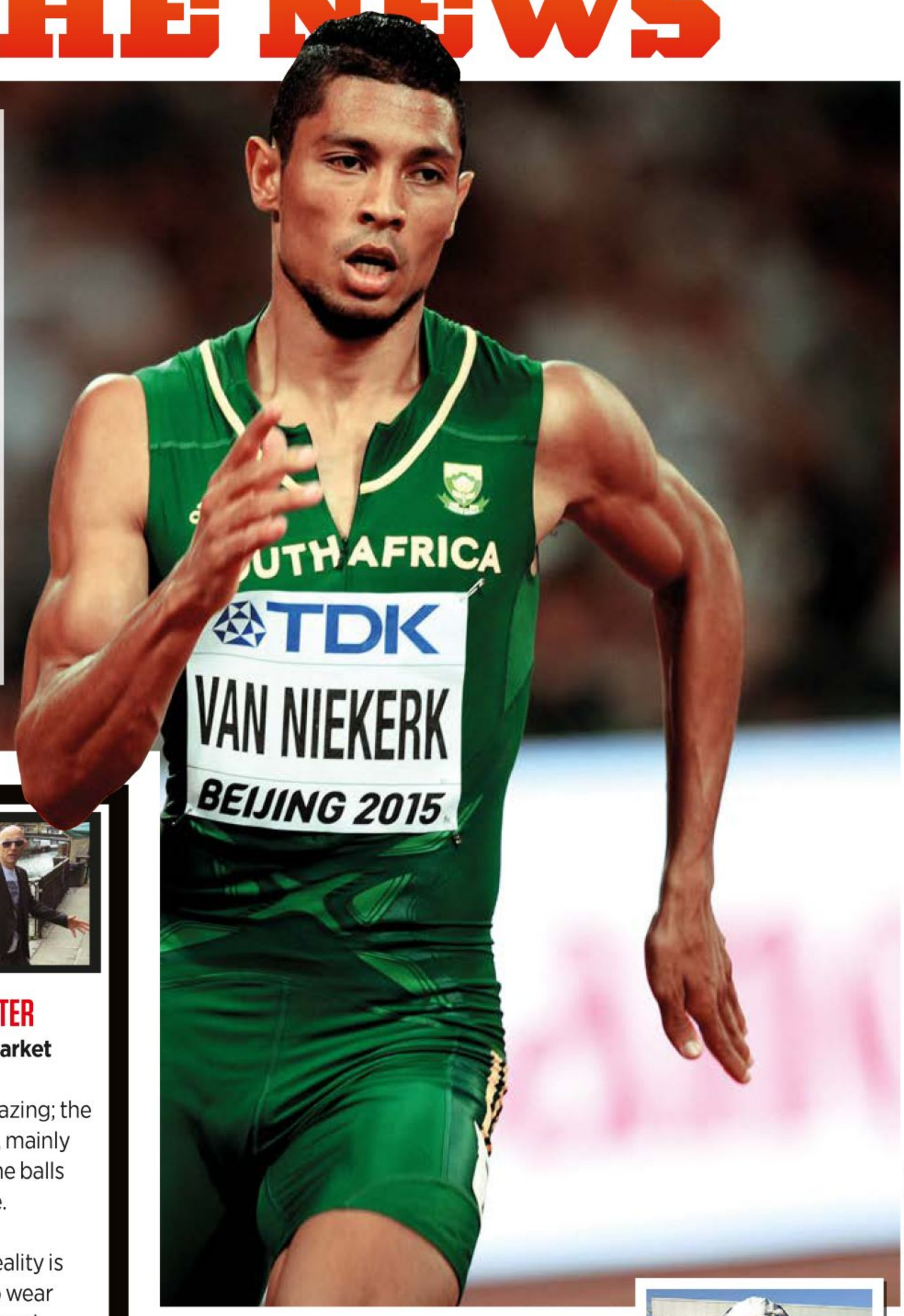
IN THE NEWS

VAN'S THE MAN

South African sprinter Wayde van Niekerk, the world champion over 400m, has become the first person in history to run under 10 seconds for 100m, 20 seconds for 200m and 44 seconds for 400m. Competing in Bloemfontein on Saturday 12 March, the 23-year-old added to his 43.48secs 400m and 19.94secs 200m with a 9.98secs 100m. Writing from his Instagram account, @waydedreamer expressed delight at his landmark achievement: 'Wow!!! Truly grateful and humbled by the opportunity and talents the Lord has blessed me with. Finally reaching my childhood dream of sub 10.'



© Mark Shearman

15 MINS WITH...

JASON BRADBURY, THE GADGET SHOW PRESENTER

What's the most exciting running tech on the market at the moment?

Recon Jet glasses get me excited. The idea is amazing; the reality inevitably falls slightly short of perfection, mainly because it only has a two-hour battery life, but the balls they had to put together the device is impressive.

Where next for running tech development?

A lot of wearables focus on navigation, but the reality is that most people don't need it. Most people who wear GPS watches are training for 5-10K – they don't need to know where they are. I think a far more useful development would be in the form of augmented reality.

Can you elaborate?

Well, where VR [virtual reality] creates an alternative world, AR adds to our surroundings. Let's face it, when it's cold and dark and you're running round the edge of a park, it's boring! So something that adds to the environment – mile markers or graphics and so on – can only be a good thing.

Does all this tech detract from the pure joy of running?

No! Data is motivation. If tech encourages people to keep fit, that's brilliant.

Jason was speaking ahead of The Gadget Show Live event in Birmingham: gadgetshowlive.net

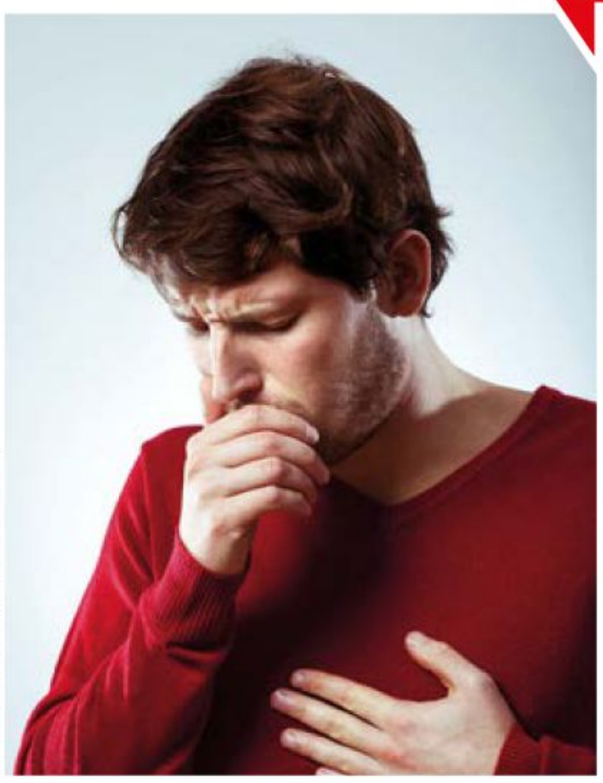
A MARATHON AT 80

Sporty octogenarian John Heywood is running this year's Virgin Money London Marathon. John, who has survived cancer and who didn't start running until he was 72, says his age is an irrelevance: "People are obsessed with the age thing, but no matter how old you are, if you look after your body, you just go on. That's what life's all about." His advice for prospective older runners? "Do it! Age is just a number. If you do take it up, it opens up a totally new life for you: new people, new friends, new challenges. Running engages you – whatever age you are." To read the full interview with John, head to the *Men's Running* website.

http://bit.ly/1XipuEB

Words Isaac Williams

HELP!



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Q "I have a chest infection and, from reading the advice, it seems that I shouldn't be running. What can I do instead to build conditioning/fitness?"
Gavin King, via Twitter

A Running with a chest infection is a big no-no so you're sensible to be seeking out other forms of exercise. A low-intensity circuit of bodyweight exercises or some light weights will help to build conditioning while you recover. The usual suspects – press-ups, sit-ups, the plank – are all recommended. But for some more exciting workouts, check out the 'Training' section of the *Men's Running* website: mensrunninguk.co.uk
Team *MR*

PENGUIN PACERS

Researchers from the University of London have carried out perhaps our favourite study of all time. The team travelled to Antarctica, equipped with a treadmill, to put king penguins through their paces. The aim was to test the effect that weight has on the penguins' mobility. The treadmill was set to just under 1mph and, unsurprisingly, the plumper penguins had a less efficient technique. They weren't always cooperative subjects, however, as researcher Astrid Willener told *The Guardian*: "Sometimes the penguins were lazy and 'water-skied' on the treadmill by leaning their back on the back wall of the treadmill. That is obviously not good for the data collection."
theguardian.com

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GENTLY DOES IT

A recent study by Harvard Medical School researchers suggests that "stompers" tend to get injured more than those who land softly. The study examined 249 heel-striking runners who run at least 20 miles a week. After two years, the runners were divided between those who got injured and those who did not, with the key finding being that the "vertical average loading weight" (a measure of the force of impact and time the foot spends in impact) was much lower in the non-injured runners.
news.harvard.edu

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THE QUESTION

COMPLETE THE SENTENCE: YOU KNOW YOU'RE A RUNNER WHEN...

That's the question we asked you on Facebook. Here's what you said...

Terry Couzens You realise you've gone from having the lung capacity of a two-year-old to running a 5K without breaking sweat

Colin Perry When booking a family holiday, you get on Google Maps to search for running routes around where you'll be staying

Steven Laverty You know off the top of your head that it's 6.47K from here to there, unless you go via the park in which case it's 7.13K

Craig Hasnip You comment on running threads on Facebook but scroll past pictures of your friend's newborn baby

Stephen Ridley Everything else just fills in time

Derek Chambers You're commenting on posts like this

Lloyd Brown You cover your nipples with plasters

John Nichols You're going on holiday and your running kit's the first thing in your suitcase

Russ Smith Your weekends are planned around your long run – although you try not to make it obvious to your better half

Want to join the debate? Get involved at **facebook.com/mensrunningmagazineuk**

SOLE MATES

A love story between a man and his favourite pair of shoes

♥ ADMIRER
Nick Beavitt, 31

♥ LOVE INTEREST
Nike Free Flyknit 4.0

WHERE WE MET
I'd been running around with the Nike Free 5.0s, but when I started marathon training this year I wanted a slightly skinnier model, so I picked up a pair of 4.0s online.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
Encouraging – they were like a sleeker version of the 5.0s with similar looks. We felt comfortable together immediately.

BEST DATE
When I plucked up the courage to take them out for a half-marathon in my old stomping ground of Wimbledon. I knew the roads pretty well, showed them around Wimbledon Village and got a PB.

WORST DATE
The 4.0s are a city type and run best on dry Tarmac. In the mud and rain, however, they can turn into a right prima donna.

FAVOURITE MEMORY
On a weekend away, I became separated from my regular pair and was scheduled to run 20K as part of my training schedule. I was able to pick up another pair and run the distance in them right away. In my hour of need, I could rely on them.

BUGBEARS
Their habit of picking up debris in their soles.

YEARS TOGETHER:
Only six months – but sometimes you just know.

WHY WE WORK
I've progressed to a more forefoot running style but still resort to some heel-striking under duress. The 4.0s have a minimalist design but don't destroy your body when you fall into bad habits.

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STEVE'S WAY

Sage advice from former 'fat bloke' turned elite marathon runner Steve Way

Left: Steve at the 2014 London Marathon
Right: celebrating his first sub 2:20 in 2010

LONDON CALLING

Most passionate marathon runners like to remind non-running friends that there are plenty of other marathons other than the one they watch on TV every April. The fact is that the London Marathon is frequently referred to as "The Marathon" by a large percentage of the population and, in my opinion, it lives up to the billing!

As far as I'm concerned, there is no bigger stage on which to play out your marathon dreams than the streets of London (and yes, I've raced New York!) For my first serious marathon in 2008, I knew it had to be London: I wanted to experience that atmosphere and crowd support as I knew the extra adrenaline would help me to my goal.

I smashed my target that year, ending up just outside the top 100. After the initial celebrations, my immediate thoughts, like most runners in these situations, was the need for more.

Since then, London has been a constant in my eight-year journey. I have returned every April and together we have shared some of the best moments of my running career. Don't get me wrong, there have also been some lows, such as having to pull out of the 2013 race due to an injury, but these just make the successes sweeter.

Standing out by a mile as my most treasured memory was 2014, specifically the final 385 yards running down The Mall. Having gone into the race with few expectations, I found myself sprinting down The Mall all on my own knowing I was about to smash my PB, qualify for the Commonwealth Games and that it would be live on the BBC as I could see the tracker camera was following me. I raised my arms to gesture to the crowd and the response sent shivers down my spine.

If this is going to be your first London, make sure you take in the atmosphere, because next year you'll be preoccupied with trying to beat your PB. And watch out for Tower Bridge: the crowd are so electric they always make you speed up too much!

Q 'I've been nursing a cold and have missed a week of marathon training as a result. I'm worried that I'm now always going to be a week behind. Should I be concerned?'
Ben Utton, Chichester

A Only a week?! I can't remember the last time I followed a marathon training plan where I didn't have some issues along the way. Assume you are going to have at least two "bad" weeks during a build-up and it won't stress you out if they happen. If you only end up having this one blip in your schedule, you are doing great and will be considerably better prepared than the majority of the field.

"FOR MY FIRST MARATHON, I KNEW IT HAD TO BE LONDON"

OVER TO YOU

Got a question for Steve? Tweet us:
@mensrunninguk

TIP OF THE MONTH

MARATHON NUTRITION

If, like me, you struggle with taking on anything other than water once you get to the second half of a marathon, stop stressing about it and change your race plan.

These days, I know my body's limits and use them to my advantage, taking my gels early and frequently and then just focusing on water intake past the halfway mark. My nutrition plan is now classified as a success. Make sure yours is, too.

MY RUNNING LIFE

Dame Kelly Holmes

The double Olympic gold medalist speaks marathons, mental strength and why she'll always run

What made you want to run the Virgin Money London Marathon?
I wanted to do my last big charity push. I've been working with charities for years, starting my own [Dame Kelly Holmes Trust] nine years ago, but I now feel like I need to focus on some new challenges. The biggest reason for picking London was the atmosphere. Last year, I went around supporting a couple of friends. It was incredible. I don't think you get too many opportunities in life to feel the real warmth and connection people have on that day.

How's the training going?
It's been tough! The biggest challenge is, biomechanically, I'm finding it difficult to adapt my style of running. When I was competing, I was a forefoot runner – I ran up on my toes with a loping stride. Now I'm finding that the longer runs are having a real impact on my lower back and putting pressure on my glutes. So I'm doing yoga to try to relieve some of the tension, but it's been a been a big struggle for my body to adapt to marathon training.

Having spent your life as an elite athlete, have you found it hard to prepare in a more relaxed fashion?
No – I've totally switched off from being an athlete these days in terms of my mindset. In fact, I've probably been a bit too relaxed! I'm so busy with all the other things I do that I'm having to fit it in around other things. But then that's the reality for the thousands of other runners taking part: you fit in marathon training around your normal life. I just need to get there – and get through it – in one piece.

How important is mental strength when it comes to running?
You can be incredibly talented and train hard, but it's the mindset that really sets people apart. I've had ups and downs in my career. One side of it was very emotional – the mindset that led me to have depression and self-harm, which is why one of the charities I'm running for is MIND – but I also taught myself the mentality to be at my best when it matters most. I think the ability to alter your mindset comes with experience and knowledge.

Do you think you'll always run?
I think so. I've been retired 11 years, believe it or not, and I now use running to maintain fitness and get some head space. I was doing duathlons a few years ago, and I enjoyed that as it was a mixture of events and wasn't too pressured. Now that I've got into parkrun, I don't think I'll be able to get out of running, which is fine by me.

How has your relationship with running changed since you retired?
I'm more relaxed. I no longer feel that there's an expectation I'm going to win everything I take part in. I'll always give my best – I'm a 100% type of person – but it's just not my lifestyle anymore. What has inspired me is taking part in parkrun, connecting with people and finding out about the reasons they're running. If I'm able to inspire other people to be the best they can be, that gives me a real buzz.

Holmes is running for the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, MIND, Myeloma UK, the Pickering Trust and Hospice in the Weald.

Interview Rick Pearson
Photography Garmin

Photo finish: Dick Beardsley (left) and Inge Simonsen ensured the first London Marathon finish was one to remember

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

29/03/1981

Members of the Queen's Guard watch on as Dick Beardsley and Inge Simonsen pass under Tower Bridge on their way to becoming joint winners of the first ever London Marathon, in 1981.

With nothing separating the American and Norwegian athletes going into the home straight, Beardsley turned to Simonsen and suggested they break the tape together. Simonsen agreed and, in an iconic moment, the pair joined hands to cross the finish line together. It was a great showing of togetherness and sportsmanship, and it perfectly encapsulated one of the six pillars on which the London Marathon was founded: 'To show that, on occasions, the family of man can be united.'

Words Rick Pearson
Photography Mark Shearman

Run to Beat MS

The MS Society is the leading national charity dedicated to beating MS. We fund research and fight for better treatment and care to help people take control of their lives.

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SUPERFOOD

FUEL YOUR RUN WITH THE RIGHT STUFF

PEEL DEAL

Everyone's favourite all-natural energy bar

WHAT IS IT?

The banana is the go-to, potassium-packed fruit for athletes the world over. All species of banana are the edible fruit of large flowering plants known as Musa. Musa can grow as tall as trees, but their stems are made of leafy stalks rather than wood – meaning they're technically oversized herbs. Although Musa species are native to Indomalaya, Australia and Papua New Guinea, the yellow banana most of us are familiar with is directly descended from those first grown far closer to home: at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, in 1836.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?

Peel and eat! To avoid any mid-exercise slip-ups, however, it's best to consume around 60 minutes prior to running. Alternatively, two whole bananas (best with brown flecks on the peel), three cups of ice and one cup of low-fat yogurt makes for a quick and easy post-run smoothie.

WHY IS IT GOOD FOR MY HEALTH?

Bananas are brimming with potassium, with one average-sized fruit containing 467mg. Potassium has been shown to reduce blood pressure and boost bone and heart health. They also contain the amino-acid tryptophan, the neurotransmitter serotonin, and the chemical norepinephrine – all of which have been shown to elevate feelings of well-being and relaxation.

Words Isaac Williams
Photography thinkstockphotos.co.uk

OFF ROAD MARATHON

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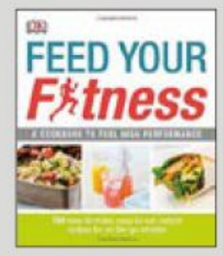
QUICK AND EASY ENERGY BARS

Boost your run with these pocket rockets



These two runner-friendly recipes come courtesy of *Feed Your Fitness*, which is published by DK and priced £12.99. **dk.com**

EASILY DIGESTIBLE

CARBOHYDRATE RICH

These energy bars are quick to make. The recipe is versatile, too: simply mix up the nuts and fruits you use to create your favourite flavour combinations.

INGREDIENTS

Serves 8
Prep 10 mins

- 140g (5oz) cashews
- 160g (5 3⁄4oz) dried cherries
- 150g (5 1⁄2oz) dried dates
- 80g (3oz) dark chocolate chips

METHOD

1. Line the bottom of a 20 × 20cm baking tray with baking parchment.
2. In a food processor fitted with a blade, whizz the cashews, cherries, and dates for 25-30 seconds.
3. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, and whizz again for 1 or 2 minutes or until the ingredients form a ball. Press the mixture evenly in the bottom of the prepared tin.
4. Sprinkle the chocolate chips over the top, and press into the fruit and nut mixture. Cover with cling film and refrigerate overnight.
5. After the bars have chilled, cut into 8 bars. Wrap each bar individually with cling film, and store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

PER SERVING

270 CALORIES

40G CARBS

12G FAT

4G PROTEIN

CHICKEN WITH ORZO PASTA

A protein-packed post-run powerhouse

FAT CONSCIOUS · PROTEIN RICH · CARBOHYDRATE RICH · EASILY DIGESTIBLE

This delicious and simple chicken dish – with fresh spinach, nutty parmesan and a little heat from the crushed chillies – is also a good source of protein and carbs.

INGREDIENTS

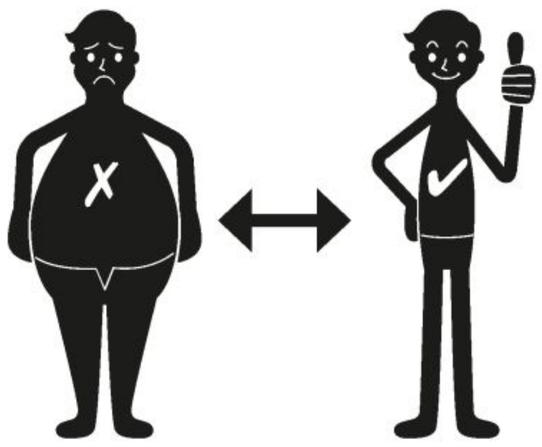
Serves 3
Prep 7 mins

- 115g (4oz) orzo pasta
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- ¼ tsp crushed chilli flakes
- 450g (8oz) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 2.5cm (1in) cubes
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 60g (2oz) fresh baby spinach
- 50g (1 3⁄4oz) parmesan cheese

METHOD

1. Fill a large pan with water, set over a medium-high heat, and bring to the boil. Add the pasta, and cook for 8-10 minutes or until al dente. Drain.
2. Heat the oil in a medium frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the garlic and crushed chilli flakes, and cook for about 1 minute or until the garlic is lightly golden.
3. Stir in the chicken, salt, and black pepper, and cook for 2-5 minutes or until lightly browned and the chicken is cooked through.
4. Reduce the heat to medium, and mix in the parsley and the cooked pasta. Add the baby spinach, and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes or until the spinach is wilted.
5. Grate the parmesan, stir it in, and serve the dish hot.

PER SERVING · 387 CALORIES · 39G CARBS · 10.3G FAT · 35G PROTEIN



FAT TO FIT

Andrew Sneddon's sedentary job and fast-food diet saw him tip the scales at over 17 stone. By taking up running, he has managed to shift the pounds and adopt a more positve outlook on life

I was chubby from about the age of 10, but as I was playing rugby and was relatively active my weight was more or less under control. Once I left school, I started work as a trainee accountant and I also moved out of my parents and in with some friends.

The combination of a sedentary job, a lack of activity outside of work and generally poor eating habits (increasing portion sizes and too many takeaways) meant the weight gradually started to pile on, and this continued into my mid-20s. Due to the gradual nature of the weight gain, I hadn't really appreciated how big I was.

Then one evening I was at a friend's party and one of my mates made a less than complimentary remark about my weight. That's when I realised how big I had become and that I needed to do something about it. I was 26 and weighed over 17 stone.

The first thing I did was cut out the fast food, as that was an easy win. I then educated myself about nutrition and in particular portion sizes, which helped me to have more sensible-sized meals. One of the hardest things was saying no to friends when they asked me to go out!

After losing about three stone, I was confident enough to join the gym and I started out with walking on the treadmill with short bursts of running. Gradually I was able to increase the running time and reduce the walking time until I could run 5K without walking. At this point, a friend told me about parkrun and I decided to give it a go. I managed my first race in 24mins 58secs back on Valentine's Day 2015 and after that the running bug really took hold.

I started to add road running to my schedule – trying to increase the distance I could go each time. Since then I've run three 10K races – improving my PB to 44mins 58secs – and two half-marathons, with a best of 1hr 37mins 46secs at the Worksop Half in October 2015. It's been a long journey, but finally hitting my target weight of 12 stone, fitting into 32ins shorts and completing my first half-marathon are the moments that have made it all so worthwhile.

"I HAVE SO MUCH MORE ENERGY NOW. I COULD BARELY RUN 26 METRES BEFORE AND NOW I'M PREPARING TO RUN 26 MILES"

My diet has also improved tenfold: I now cook a lot more from scratch and swapped out some ingredients for healthier alternatives. I also make sure to eat a proper breakfast rather than snack on sugar-filled cereal bars throughout the morning.

I have so much more energy than I did back then. I could barely run 26 metres before and now I'm preparing to run 26 miles. My whole lifestyle has changed for the better. Running has introduced me to new friends, and trying out new routes has let me see my city from completely new angles.

OVER TO YOU

Have you gone from fat to fit? Email your weight-loss story to **mensrunning@wildbunchmedia.co.uk**

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RUNNER'S DIGEST

*Nutritionist **Renee McGregor** takes a look at what's wrong with 'fad' diets*

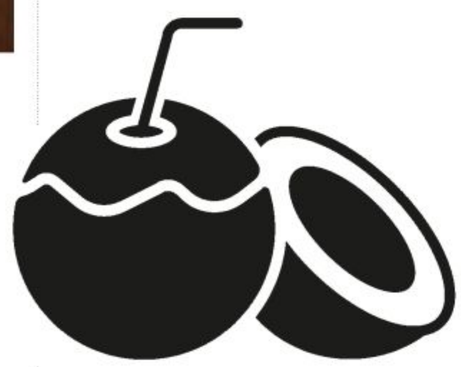
As a rule, it's unsustainable and unhealthy to remove entire food groups – which is exactly what a lot of fad diets tend to promote. Here are three more guidelines to allow healthy eating to become part of your lifestyle, rather than a short-term fix.

■ **Don't fear carbs.** We are bombarded with information in the media about carbohydrates being bad for us. But the reason carbs get a bad press is that it is easy to eat the wrong type to excess. However, including nutrient-dense sources of carbohydrate such as whole grains, pasta, rice, sweet potatoes, potatoes, oats, beans/pulses, dairy, fruit and vegetables is necessary for the body to function correctly. These foods provide energy but also other key nutrients such as B Vitamins, fibre, calcium, zinc and iron.

■ **Allow for a small amount of sugar**. Everybody is fearful of sugar. However, no food group should be demonised. Eating sugar to excess is obviously not ideal but consuming a small amount, even on a daily basis, is not a problem.

■ **Don't ditch dairy.** With so many dairy alternatives on the market, from oat and hemp to coconut and almond, it is easy to think that there must be something wrong with good old milk. However, don't be fooled: these alternatives often have little to no nutritional value. Almond milk, for instance, contains 0.1g/100ml of protein. From a recovery and nutritional point of view, it is absolutely useless. Obviously not everyone can tolerate dairy, so in these cases it is best to use soya or lactose-free milk as these still contain a suitable amount of protein and calcium.

Milk it: dairy gets an unnecessarily bad press



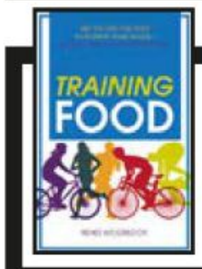
■ **Be careful with coconut.** It may be very trendy at the moment, but coconut is not always as healthy as it's made out to be. The latest kid to join the coconut family is coconut sugar. My main message here is: don't be tricked into thinking that just because a dessert recipe contains coconut sugar, it makes it a healthier option. It's still sugar and still contains the same number of calories. So that virtuous dessert you just tucked into has exactly the same amount of energy whether it was made with coconut or table sugar.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ **5% – the amount of people who lose weight on a very restrictive diet and keep the weight off.** ***greatergood.edu***

■ **Curb your cravings – protein will make you feel fuller for longer. If you find it hard to curb your cravings, try to make one third of each of your main meals a healthy protein like lean meat, egg whites, yogurt, cheese, soy, nuts or beans.**

■ **Fibre's your friend – it aids digestion, lowers cholesterol and can help with weight loss. Men need about 38g a day. Oatmeal, beans and wholegrain foods are some of the best sources.**



Renee McGregor is the best-selling author of *Training Food*: ***eatwellfeelfab.co.uk***

Images thinkstockphotos.co.uk

MAY

TRAIN

INSIDE

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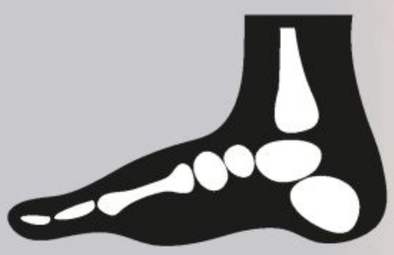
ANATOMY OF A RUNNER



NAME: DAVID WEIR
DISTANCE: 400M, 800M, 1500M, 5000M, MARATHON

TRAIN LIKE WEIR

DEDICATE YOURSELF

For close to two decades, David Weir has pushed his body to the limit, day in, day out. His commitment to his sport has seen him hailed as "the greatest wheelchair athlete of all time," and he's not done yet. This year, he'll seek to win a record-breaking seventh London Marathon and win yet more gold medals at the Rio Paralympics.

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

Weir's trademark strength is the product of years of training around the undulating terrain of Richmond Park, west London. In the build-up to the London Paralympics, his long-term coach, Jenny Archer – whom Weir has hailed as "the best in the world by far" – had him training with pro cyclists round seven-mile laps of the Park.

MIX IT UP

If he's not on one of his long outings (he regularly clocks over 100 miles a week), Weir will be out on the track doing the sort of speed work that runners can easily replicate. Try, for instance, 12 x 300m with 100m easy recovery. "Gym work is also really important for upper-body strength," he told *MR* – "boring, but important!"

"HE'S BEEN HAILED AS 'THE GREATEST WHEELCHAIR ATHLETE OF ALL TIME'"

DIET

Weir's intense training schedule is fueled on a high-carb diet founded on plenty of sweet potato and spaghetti. He also makes sure he has enough protein for recovery and a vitamin-packed smoothie once a day to bolster his immune system.

ARMS

The explosive sprint finish for which Weir is famed can be traced back to his gargantuan guns. Bicep curls and tricep extensions form the basis of his arm-building strength work, but clocking up in excess of 100 miles a week helps ensure that sheer strength is coupled with unbeatable stamina.

ABS

Without strong core muscles, Weir wouldn't generate nearly as much power with each stroke of the wheel. In the gym, he does a lot of work with medicine balls to build stability and explosive strength.

CHAIR

Weir's Draft wheelchair weighs in at just 7kg. A 'compensator' on the main frame acts like a rudder, holding the steering for the straight and bend so that his focus is on generating power, rather than steering. The rear wheels, meanwhile, are attached to outer 'push rims' which Weir punches down on.

Words Isaac Williams
Photography Virgin Money London Marathon

MENTALITY

Fiercely independent from a young age, Weir's determination to succeed shines through.
In his early years, he resisted using a wheelchair at all, preferring instead to use calipers and walking sticks – something that goes a long way to explaining his naturally collosal upper-body strength.

SHOULDERS

The most important muscle when it comes to wheelchair racing, strong shoulders help to generate maximum force when punching down on the rim of the wheel. Dumbbell shoulder presses and lat pull-downs prime Weir for maximum pushing power.

DAVID'S A GOLIATH

Despite being born with a severed spinal cord, David Weir never let disability stand in his way. And, being a keen sports fan, it didn't take long for him to find his calling in wheelchair racing. He won the junior event at the London Marathon no less than seven times and, as a hugely promising 17-year-old, travelled to his first Paralympic Games in Atlanta in 1996. The Games, though, were a disappointed and led to Weir taking a four-year hiatus from the sport.

However, he returned in 2000 to finish fifth in the London Marathon – setting up a career-defining affinity with a race that he has since won a remarkable six times.

It was in 2008, however, at the Beijing Paralympics, that 'the Weirwolf' rose to prominence, winning 800m and 1500m gold. Four years on, during in an incredible nine-day period at the London Paralympics, he cemented his status as the greatest wheelchair racer in the world; winning gold in the 5000m, 1500m, 800m and, on the final day of the Games, the Marathon. Truly, an incredible athlete.

GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE 4

SUPPORTING YOUR RUNNER

Our monthly guide to running etiquette takes a look at how to be a first-class support act

1. RESPECT THE COURSE: You're checking your iPhone, trying to follow your runner's progress. You walk, head down, and then... BANG! You've collided with a runner. Think: if you are going to cross the course, do it quickly and when there's a big enough gap.

2. MAKE A SIGN: Nothing says "I love you" like a giant homemade sign. It doesn't have to be a great work of poetry; a short, encouraging phrase will do nicely. For top marks, embrace your inner artist and add a dash of colour.

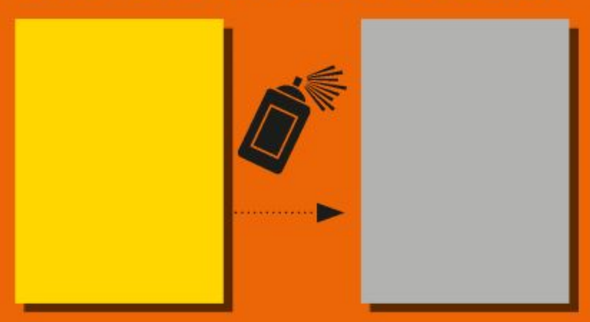
3. KNOW THE COURSE: A little planning goes a long way. Familiarise yourself with the route and when your runner is likely to be passing certain landmarks. Bonus points are available to the supporter who manages to see their runner not once but twice during a race.

4. FIND YOUR RUNNER: Obvious statement alert: marathons are busy. Unless your runner's choice of attire is completely unique – vest and shorts doesn't count – they're likely to blend in with the crowd. So stay alert, keep 'em peeled and don't disappear to the pub to 'hydrate'.

5. CELEBRATE AFTERWARDS: Arrange a place to reconvene with your runner once they've completed their race. Make sure this is within hobbling distance of the finishing line. And remember: the first round is most definitely on you.

SIGN, SEALED DELIVERED

HOW TO MAKE A MARATHON SIGN



1. Buy an A2 piece of white or coloured card and mount it to a piece of cardboard, ideally using a spray mount.

2. Write your motivational phrase in Arial Black (300 font size). Print this out and then cut out the words. Mount these to your piece of card.

3. Buy a broom handle. Make four small holes in your card (two at the top, two at the bottom) and thread a cable tie through them, attaching your card to the broom handle by pulling the cable ties tight. Season your poster with a handful of glitter. Voila!

For more information, check out the *Men's Running* poster-making video: bit.ly/1VQDWDi

OVER TO YOU

Got an etiquette suggestion? Tweet us: **@mensrunninguk**

Illustrations Peter Liddiard @ Sudden Impact

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HIGH5 is a British company dedicated to providing sports nutrition that is scientifically formulated to work and taste great. To ensure the highest standards, products undergo rigorous testing both in the lab and with athletes in the real world.

The HIGH5 Nutrition Pack contains 4 EnergyGels, 3 ZERO tubes and a handy running bottle. All this is sure to help you make 2016 your running year!

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CROSS-TRAINING
OF THE MONTH

FREELETICS

Short on space, time and money? Maybe it's time to try Freeletics, the cross-training app that's spreading like wildfire. **Rick Pearson** jumps to it

What if there was a way to get strong and toned that required limited equipment, minimal money and less than 20 minutes of your time. Well, there is. Freeletics – a new coaching app – is providing people with a series of intensive workouts and individual training plans that they can do anytime, anywhere. All the exercises are given the names of Greek gods (Zeus, Aphodite, etc) and are bodyweight-based, meaning the only equipment required is a chin-up bar and exercise mat. To find out more, *MR* went to one of Freeletics' early-morning group training classes in Central London.

ARMS

Many of the Freeletics workouts test your upper-body strength. Exercises such as press-ups and chin-ups are commonplace. And, as they are all bodyweight-based, you'll develop lean muscle rather than speed-sapping bulk.

STOMACH

Working at high-intensity is a real calorie-burner, with many people signing up to Freeletics for its weight-loss qualities alone. There's also a major focus on core strength, honed by exercises such as sit-ups, press-ups and the dreaded burpees. A strong core, as we all know, is key to efficient running.

GLUTES

If there's one thing Freeletics loves more than anything, it's squatting. The exercise plays a central role in many of the workouts, and your glutes will be the chief beneficiary. Strong glute muscles are a runner's best friend, so it's time to embrace the squat.

CARDIO

Freeletics routines don't take long but there's a trade off: you have to work really hard. Performing each exercise at high-intensity and keeping rests between sets to a complete minimum makes them a fantastic aerobic workout.

MENTAL STRENGTH

It takes considerable mental strength to knock out 50 burpees, particularly when you know they'll be followed by 100 squats. You will feel like quitting but, just like when racing, somehow you'll carry on. Building your mental resolve while building muscle has to be a good thing.

CALVES

Freeletics' focus on explosive movements will see you bouncing around like Tigger on speed. The result of this will be strong calf muscles, a must for all runners.

TRY THIS
SET 1
■ 10 burpees
■ 10 mountain climbers
■ 10 tuck jumps
SET 2
■ 25 burpees
■ 25 mountain climbers
■ 25 tuck jumps
SET 3
■ 10 burpees
■ 10 mountain climbers
■ 10 tuck jumps

WORKS FOR ME

MARCO SOMMER, TRIATHLETE

I came across Freeletics Running in the early stages of its development, as I was lucky enough to be a tester for the app. I'm a former triathlete but fell out of shape over the last few years – going from an Ironman to a couch potato. I feel very lucky that I got the chance to get back into physical shape with the help of Freeletics.

The first running sessions were tough. I felt like an 80-year-old grandpa in a body half that age, but I kept at it and kept on running. After two weeks, I noticed the improvements: I had lost some weight and body fat, which gave me the motivation to continue. I also started to think about my nutrition, conscious of the saying that "you are what you eat".

By changing my eating habits and taking up Freeletics, I lost approximately 6kg and 4% fat within the first six weeks.

I then added Freeletics bodyweight training to my running routine. The first bodyweight sessions were very tough, and I hated every single burpee and push-up. After a while, however, the combination made my body stronger, fitter, and faster. As a result, I lost almost 10kg and 6% body fat over 12 weeks.

"I LOST APPROXIMATELY 6KG AND 4% FAT WITHIN THE FIRST SIX WEEKS"

★ THE VERDICT

AEROBIC BENEFITS:	■■■■■■■■■
MUSCLE BUILDING:	■■■■■■■■■
SAFETY:	■■■■■■■■■
VALUE FOR MONEY:	■■■■■■■■■
FUN FACTOR:	■■■■■■■■■

freeletics.com

TAKE A STAND

Sitting down is ruining your health and your running. It's time you did something about it, says rehab therapist **Robert Griffiths**

Surprising as it may sound, most people spend well over 12 hours a day sitting down. Dont' believe me? Just add it up:

COMMUTING:	**1 HOUR**
OFFICE CHAIR:	**8 HOURS**
BREAKFAST/ LUNCH/ DINNER:	**1 HOUR**
TV/ LAPTOP TIME:	**2 HOURS**
TOTAL:	**12 HOURS**

That's a huge amount of time for a land mammal with two legs that is designed to hunt for its food using movement.

I have never seen a chimpanzee or an Olympic marathon runner sitting in front of a computer for 12 hours a day. So you really shouldn't be doing it either.

Sitting is not just bad for you, it's ruining your health. Sedentary lifestyles cause diabetes, muscle shortening, joint arthritis, slipped discs, high blood pressure and many other life-damaging conditions. For runners, however, it can cause something only slightly less traumatic: a bad PB.

Twelve hours of sitting per day causes one major problem for runners: tight muscles in your hip flexors. If you want to have the same stride length and PB as your granny, then sitting is the perfect way to achieve it. Secondly, tight hips flexors cause back injuries; the reduced range of motion in the hip causes a huge amount of force to be transferred through your skeletal system, causing pinching in the lower back joints. So how do you fix such a performance-wrecker?

"SITTING DOWN IS NOT JUST BAD FOR YOU, IT'S RUINING YOUR HEALTH"

1

2

THE WALL MOBILISATION

This disgustingly difficult stretch will open up anyone's tight hips. Take it steady at first and ease into the position. If keeping your knee against the wall is too difficult, then move it slightly further away.

Key point: don't just statically hold it in the end position; instead, gently flex and extend your hip to create small amounts of movement through the front of the thigh. Do this for just two minutes every day for one month, and you will see huge improvements in your posture and performance.

Robert Griffiths is a chiropractor and rehab therapist at ***ProPerformanceClinics.com***

BEST STANDING DESKS

ERGOTRON WORKFIT-TL, £396

This workstation is brilliantly designed and simple to use. Boasting 38cm of vertical adjustment, it offers you the chance to instantly move from seated to standing or vice-versa: simply release the hand-brake levers on either side. It can support 18kg – easily enough for two monitors – and feels reassuringly secure. Plus it goes a little bit higher than a Varidesk, but who's counting?

ergotron.com

VARIDESK PRO PLUS 36, £335

The titan of the standing-desk world, the Varidesk is super slick in design and appearance; with a spring-assisted lift for effortless adjustment and a weight limit of 15.8kg. The two-tiered design is easily spacious enough for two monitors, and even when lowered the desk provides an air of importance that colleagues are sure to acknowledge. Now, how about that promotion?

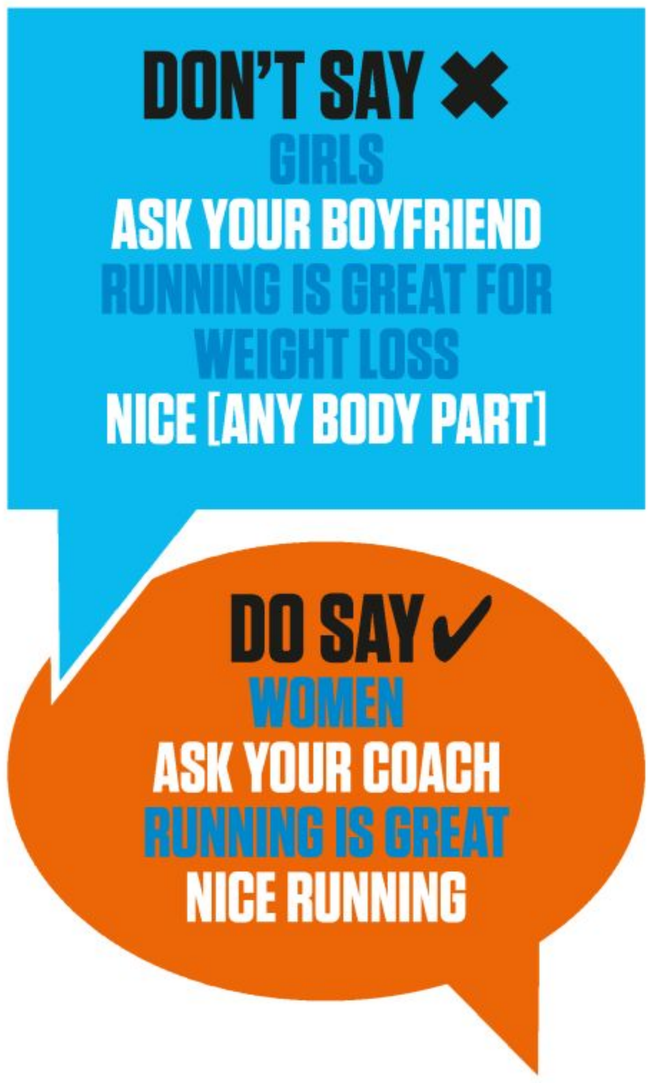
uk.varidesk.com

THE OTHER HALF

*Columnist **Laura Fountain** has some advice on how to talk to women at races*

Think before you speak: "You're running well," doesn't need the addition of, "for a girl"

© thinkstockphotos.co.uk



I was 70K into an 80K ultramarathon in France. I was cold, hungry and tired. I'd been running on my own through dark woods for the past hour when I came up to the last aid station of the race. I approached a drinks table to fill up my water where five men stood around it doing the same.

One asked me a question in French and I replied with a shrug: *"Pardon, je ne parle pas Français."* But he carried on talking to me, and as he did the four other men stared at me laughing.

Maybe it was because I was English. Maybe it was my pronunciation. Maybe it was any number of things. But in that moment I was a woman, on my own in the darkness, with five men pointing at me and laughing. It was an intimidating experience.

I see that scene as a microcosm of running as a whole. Women are in the minority at most races, with the gender split being more pronounced the longer the race. While, thankfully, there's little pointing and laughing, some still see us as a novelty, and feel the need to comment on our presence as though they've just seen a giraffe casually strolling down Oxford Street. "Well, look at that, would you ever?"

My friend Cathy is a good runner with strong legs, which she is currently training to power her round an Ironman distance triathlon. At the end of a local 10K, a guy who'd finished just behind her approached her in the queue for bananas for a chat. His opener: "You run fast on those little legs."

Cathy is the same height as Haile Gebrselassie, with quads the Emperor of Distance Running would envy. Would this guy have congratulated Haile on his 2:03 marathon the same way? I think it's safe to assume he wouldn't.

Now, I appreciate you men want to be encouraging of women who run, and want to encourage the non-running women in your lives – your wives, your girlfriends, your sisters and mothers – into running. We're on the same side. But sometimes you muddle your words up and it comes out all wrong.

I'm not sure if Socrates did much running, but his 'Triple Filter' rule works quite well for communicating with runners of the opposite sex. Had the runner who told my friend, Katie, at mile 23 of the London Marathon as she reached for a Jelly Baby, "You'll get fat eating that," applied Socrates' principle of 'Is it true, is it good and is it useful?' I'm quite certain he would have kept his mouth shut.

But I think there's a much simpler rule for talking to women: ask yourself 'Would I say this to a man?' And just like that, a comment about little legs simply becomes "Good running."

TALKING HEADS

SHOULD I RUN IN HEADPHONES?

A powerful motivator or an unnecessary distraction? Two running experts debate the benefits of moving to music

EXPERT ADVICE

Dr Costas Karagheorgis is an expert in sports psychology and the author of *Applying Music in Exercise and Sport* (Human Kinetics Publishers, 2016).

YES

■ What is the advantage of running to music?

One of the main benefits is that it reduces perceived exertion – often by about 10% – and enhances mood. That holds true for low- and moderate-intensity running. At high-intensity running, music has no effect in terms of lowering perceived exertion, but it does still elevate mood at high intensities.

■ Does running become boring without some external stimulus?

For some people, particularly those who have a dissociative attention style – in other words, those with a tendency to focus outwards – music can be a welcome distraction from the onerous nature of running. It can relieve boredom, distract the mind from the fatigue-related symptoms of the run, and make the whole experience more immersive and pleasurable.

■ Is running, in your opinion, becoming too gadget-dependent?

Possibly, yes. There's a freedom associated with running, wherein it puts you in touch with the functionality of your body. Using gadgetry can detract from that. But for people who are finding it hard to engage in a habitual physical activity programme, there's no doubt that gadgetry can act as a motivational tool. I'm not necessarily advocating that elite runners listen to music while training and racing, but it can certainly be a useful training aid for Joe Public.

■ Are there any scenarios in which you'd discourage people from running to music?

I would strongly dissuade people from using a personal music device on pavements and roads, as well as in parks at night. Music is such an effective stimulant that it can become intoxicating, and thus it causes you to miss important cues in your environment, such as somebody shouting at you or somebody beeping their car horn. If you go to your local park in the daytime or run on a treadmill, that's fine.

"MUSIC REDUCES PERCEIVED EXERTION AND ENHANCES MOOD"

Photography thinkstockphotos.co.uk

EXPERT ADVICE

Jonny Muir is a runner and author. He's currently working on a book about Scottish hill running **heightsofmadness.co.uk**

NO

■ What is the advantage of running without music?

When I run, I want to connect with the world around me. With much of my running taking place in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh, that means connecting with nature: the call of birds, the heave of the wind, the crunch of scree.

■ Does running become boring without some external stimulus?

I used to live in Cheltenham and on my walk to work each morning I passed a wall of graffiti emblazoned with the words: 'Only boring people get bored'. I also like Einstein's assertion that 'imagination is more important than intelligence'. Do I need to elaborate further?

■ Is running, in your opinion, becoming too gadget-dependent?

As a society, we are dependent on technology; running merely reflects society. When I noticed my GPS watch had failed to record the first mile of a recent commute from work to home, I panicked. Like many others, I have fallen into the trap of recording every inch of my movements. The addiction forms part of our need to over-share. When I asked a world champion mountain runner about the distractions of social media, she said: "I care about what I'm doing. I don't care about others." And that's probably why she became a world champion.

■ Do those who run in headphones risk missing out on the race-day atmosphere of events like the London Marathon?

Experiences are gained through the senses. If you dull one of them, the experience is inevitably impaired. What I remember most vividly about my five London Marathon races is sound: the wall of noise around Tower Bridge, the ringing echo of the tunnels, the rhythm of your feet striking road. Those are all a vital part of the package that make a London Marathon place a golden ticket; remove these elements and you may as well run a marathon anywhere.

"WHEN I RUN, I WANT TO CONNECT WITH THE WORLD AROUND ME"

FINE TUNING

Follow **Martin Yelling's** advice to arrive at the start line in the best shape possible

EXPERT ADVICE

Martin Yelling is an endurance coach, ex-international athlete and husband to Olympic marathoner Liz Yelling. With a half-marathon PB of 66 minutes, Martin specialises in running coaching and hosts the Marathon Talk podcast.

It's vital that, as race day draws closer, you stay focused, on top of your training and confident you can reach your goals. The hard work you've put in, the miles you've nailed, the beers you've declined and the fitness you've gained is all coming to fruition and it'll soon be time to cash it in and run the race of your dreams. But first you've got to get your last few bits of preparation bang on or risk jeopardising your goals.

COMMON MISTAKES IN RACE-DAY BUILD-UP

1. **Playing catch up**. It's all too easy at this stage to make the classic mistake of doubting the training you've done to reach this point, think you haven't done enough miles, panic and try to run more in the final month than you've run in the past three. This simply won't work. You will not get any fitter by smashing out extra long runs or testing yourself as the race draws closer.

2. **Kicking back too early.** You can't afford to relax just yet, because you risk overlooking an important part of the final build-up. Just because training might be reducing, it doesn't mean that focus should drop.

3. **Getting injured or ill.** After a long build-up to become race-ready, the last thing you need is to get injured or ill in the final few weeks. This means listening to your body, being attentive to the signals, and responding appropriately (often with rest) to ensure race-day fitness.

4. **Letting nerves get the better of you.** Allowing nerves to build beyond optimal can jeopardise performance. Remind yourself that you chose to do this. It's fun!

BACK OFF

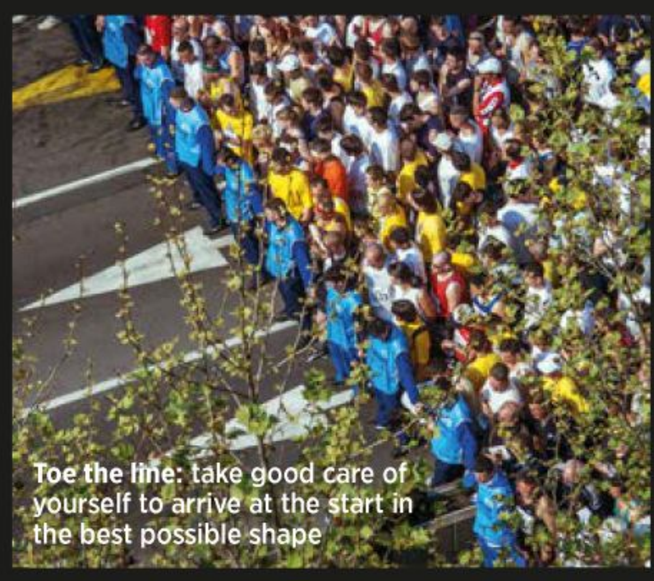
Tapering involves a reduction in the volume (how long you run) and the intensity (how fast you run) in the weeks leading up to the race, while maintaining some frequency (how often you run). It also involves effective nutrition, rest and developing mental strategies to help you reach your best when it matters. The goal of your taper is to maintain your fitness, revitalise your muscles and reach physical and mental peak on race day.

A marathon taper may begin three weeks before the important race, with mileage decreasing by 30% each week. It's a good idea to maintain some intensity in your running even in the final few weeks, just cut back on the length of your runs but stay sharp. The key is to keep reminding your body what it feels like to run.

It's common to feel either a little restless and full of energy, or more lethargic than normal during a taper. Don't worry. A great taper gets you ready to race feeling excited, fit, fresh and up for it.

STAY FREE OF ILLNESS AND INJURY

This is your number one priority. Really listen to how you feel and how your body is responding to the running you are doing. You are far better off arriving at the start line slightly underprepared than ill or injured. Help yourself to stay healthy by paying extra attention to your nutrition, staying hydrated, washing your hands regularly and getting enough sleep. The final few weeks are the time to really look after yourself.



Toe the line: take good care of yourself to arrive at the start in the best possible shape

DEAL WITH NERVES

Arriving at race day triggers all sorts of feelings for newbies and experienced campaigners alike. Nerves, excitement, apprehension, doubt, confidence, fear and courage all flow through you as you line up at the start. Even the most successful runners get nervous. What they are good at, however, is turning this anxiety into positive pressure and using that electricity and energy for a better performance – instead of letting it hold them back.

On the start line itself, pause for a moment and quietly take stock of your journey. Look around you and embrace your surroundings: the other runners; the tension in the air; the sound of excitement and the frenzy of a race; the test of personal courage and commitment that is about to begin. Close your eyes and draw in a deep breath through your nose and completely fill your lungs. Exhale slowly through your mouth, open your eyes and tell yourself you deserve your spot on the start line, you are feeling strong and you're ready to go.

Run your perfect race through in your head. Imagine watching a film of the race happening as you'd like it to. See each mile tick away exactly as planned. Run strongly, confidently and in control. See yourself getting stronger with each passing mile.

Photography thinkstockphotos.co.uk

GOLDEN RULES FOR RACE-DAY SUCCESS

■ Instead of running more in the final few weeks, run smarter and run less. Include the same frequency of runs, include a little intensity but drop the duration. That way you'll maintain your fitness and marathon stamina while also ensuring you're fully refreshed and recovered to hit race day.

■ Eat a healthy, well-balanced and nutritious diet that contains some carbohydrate and protein to help energise your muscles. That doesn't mean you need to stuff your face with pasta the week before; it just means eating what you'd usually eat – something that you know works.

■ Even though you might have a little more time, don't fill race week with extra jobs or over-commit to work or social activities. Leave the DIY until after the race and try and relax and feel confident, strong and ready during race week. Be at ease with yourself.

■ Look back at how far you've come. Remind yourself of all the good things you've achieved in your training over the past few months and about your progress and achievements. Project forward to race day and see yourself running a strong race and one where you achieve your personal targets.

■ Make sure you're organised. It's easy to overlook the simple things. Make sure you know race start details, what kit you'll wear, how you'll get there and when, what (and who!) you'll take with you. Being organised helps you stay relaxed, calm and focused when the big day arrives.

3 FINAL-MONTH SESSIONS

■ 1 mile easy-paced running. 3 miles at your target marathon pace – feel relaxed, strong and in control. 1 mile easy-paced.

■ 10mins easy running then 3mins hard (1min rest), 2mins hard (1min rest), 1min hard (3mins rest). Repeat the 3-2-1 efforts a total of 3 times. 10mins easy.

■ 10mins easy then 6 x 3mins at threshold (80% maximum effort) with 90secs jog recovery.

OVER TO YOU

Do you have a question for Martin? Drop us an email at **mensrunning@wildbunchmedia.co.uk**

FULL BODY BLITZ

A complete workout in less than 20 minutes

SETS, REPS AND FREQUENCY

Perform each exercise for one minute. Change over to the next exercise without resting. After completing all five exercises, rest for two minutes. Repeat the circuit two to three times.

1 LUNGE ROTATION

Muscles: Thighs, core, side muscles (quadriceps, transversus abdominus, obliques)

Why do it?

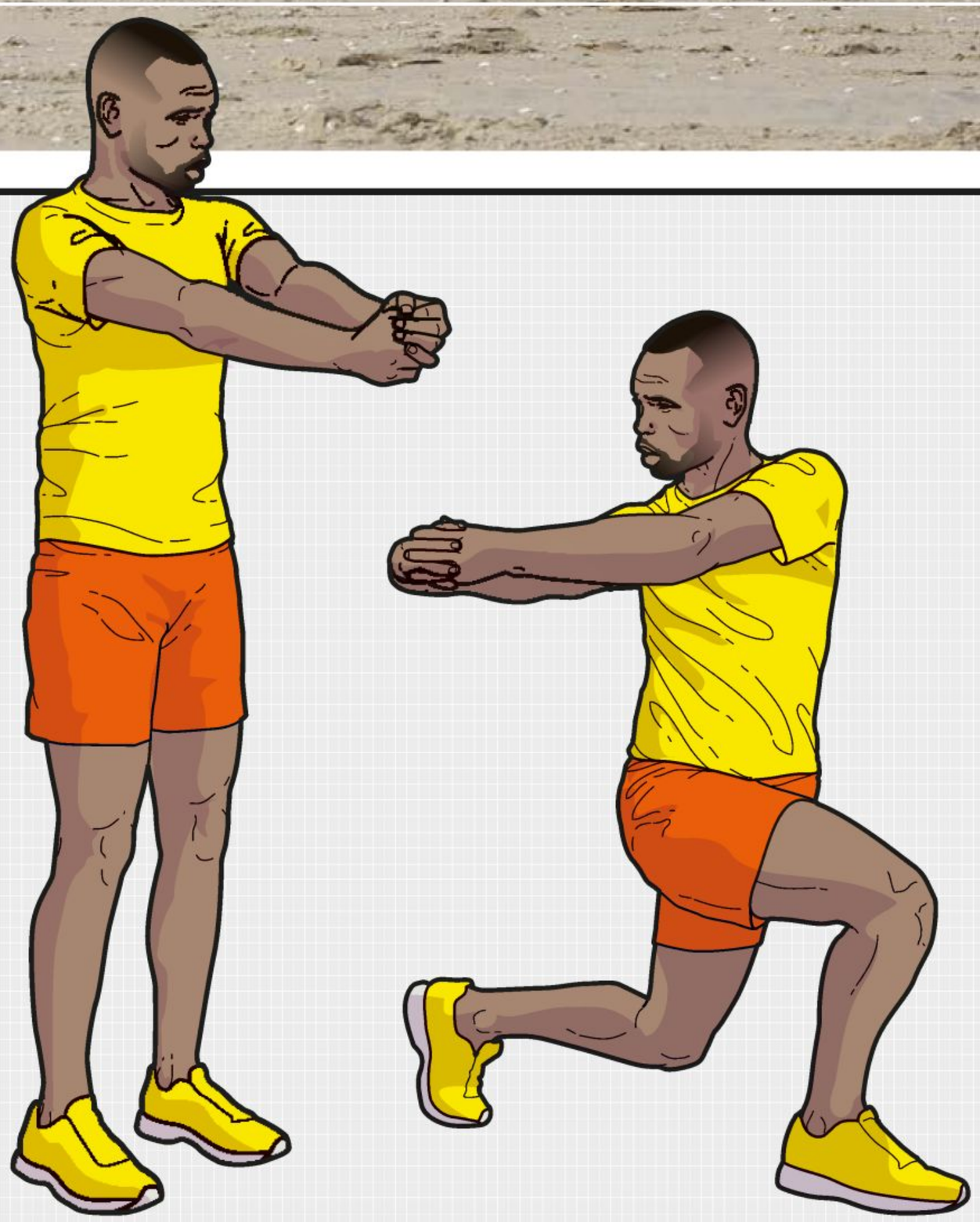
Improve your leg strength and balance

Technique:

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart
- Step forward with your right leg while twisting your body towards the right
- Bend both knees to perform a lunge
- Step back to the starting position and repeat to the left
- Alternate between right and left

Watch points:

Keep your upper body upright and try not to lean forward



Words Anne-Marie Lategan
Illustrations Peter Liddiard @ Sudden Impact

2 PLANK ROTATION

Muscles: Core, side muscles, back, shoulders (transversus abdominus, obliques, erector spinae, deltoids)

Why do it?

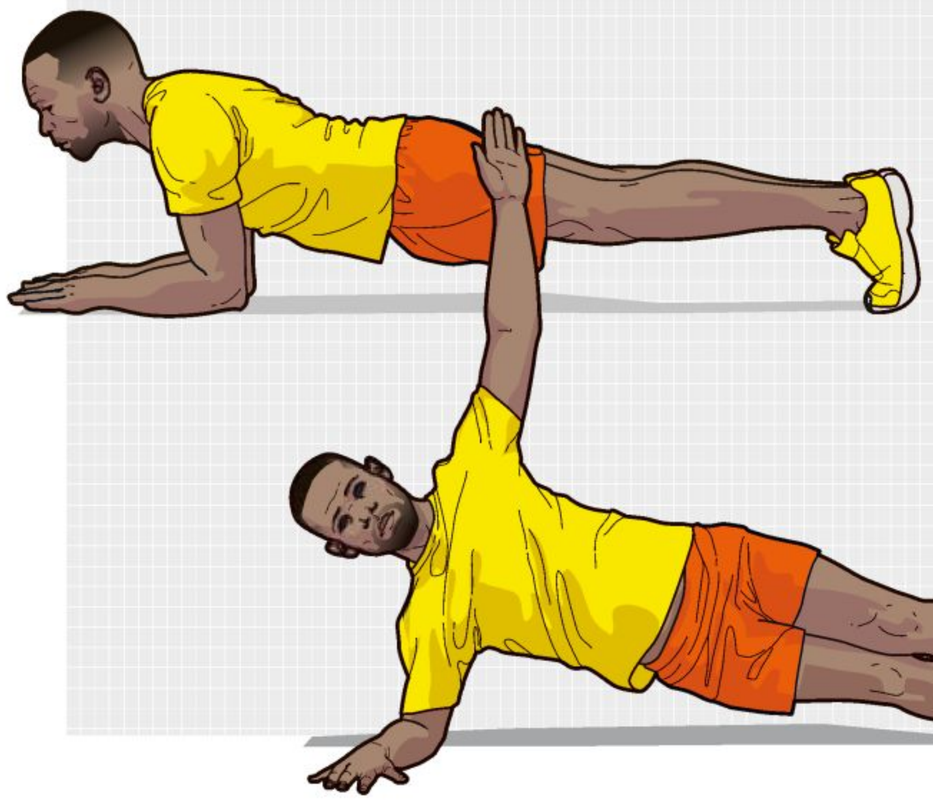
A great full-body workout that will shape your waistline and improve your running technique

Technique:

- Lie on your stomach and place your elbows directly underneath your shoulders
- Lift your hips off the floor to form a straight line between your head, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles
- Prop yourself up on your right forearm
- Lift your left arm up to the ceiling
- Hold the position for two counts
- Return to the centre position and repeat on the other side

Watch points:

If you experience pain in your lower back, lift your bottom slightly higher to prevent your lower back from arching



3 PRESS-UP SUPERMAN

Muscles: Chest, upper arms, core, back, shoulders (pectorals, triceps, transversus abdominus, erector spinae, trapezius, deltoids)

Why do it?

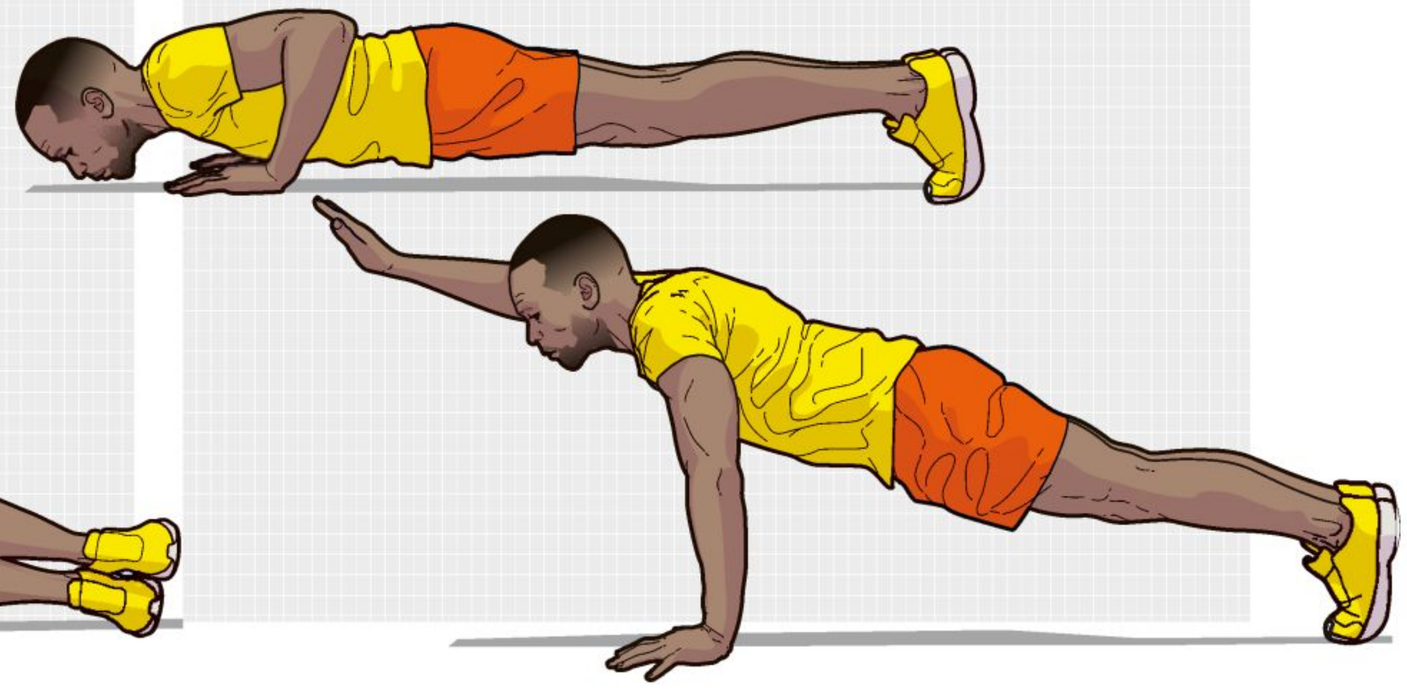
An effective exercise to improve your upper-body strength

Technique:

- Kneel on all fours
- Position your hands directly underneath your shoulders
- Lower your hips to form a straight line between your shoulders, hips and knees
- Bend your elbows to perform a press-up
- As you return to the starting position, lift your right hand up and extend it out in front of you
- Keep your arm next to your ear
- Tense your stomach to aid balance
- Return your right hand to the floor
- Perform another press-up and repeat the move with your left arm
- Alternate between right and left

Watch points:

Keep your hips level when lifting your arms



4 MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

Muscles: Chest, upper arms, stomach muscles, core, back, shoulders, hip flexors (pectorals, triceps, rectus abdominus, transversus abdominus, erector spinae, trapezius, deltoids, psoas muscles)

Why do it?

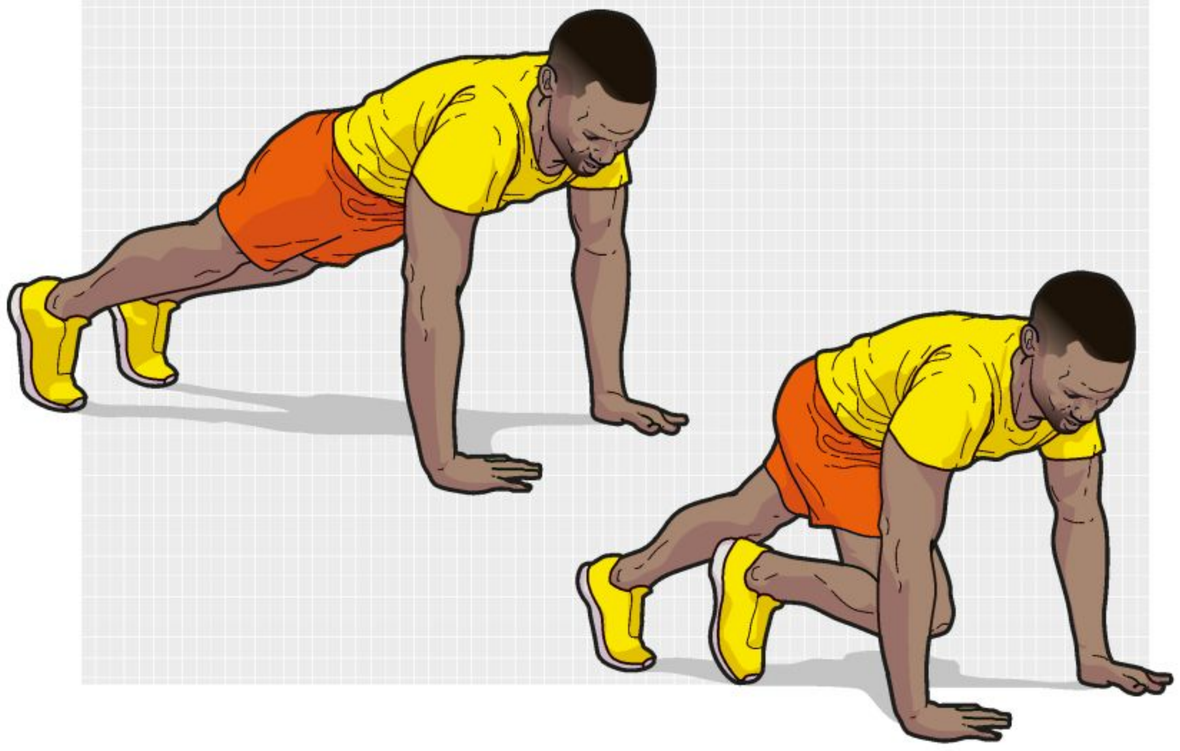
A great full-body exercise that will improve your posture and strength

Technique:

- Get into the press-up position
- Bend your elbows and bring your right knee in to your right elbow
- Return your leg
- Repeat with your left leg
- Alternate between right and left

Watch points:

If you experience pain in your lower back, lift your bottom slightly higher to prevent your lower back from arching. Be careful with this exercise if you have high blood pressure



5 SQUAT JUMPS

Muscles: Thighs, hip flexors, bottom (quadriceps, psoas muscles, glutes)

Why do it?

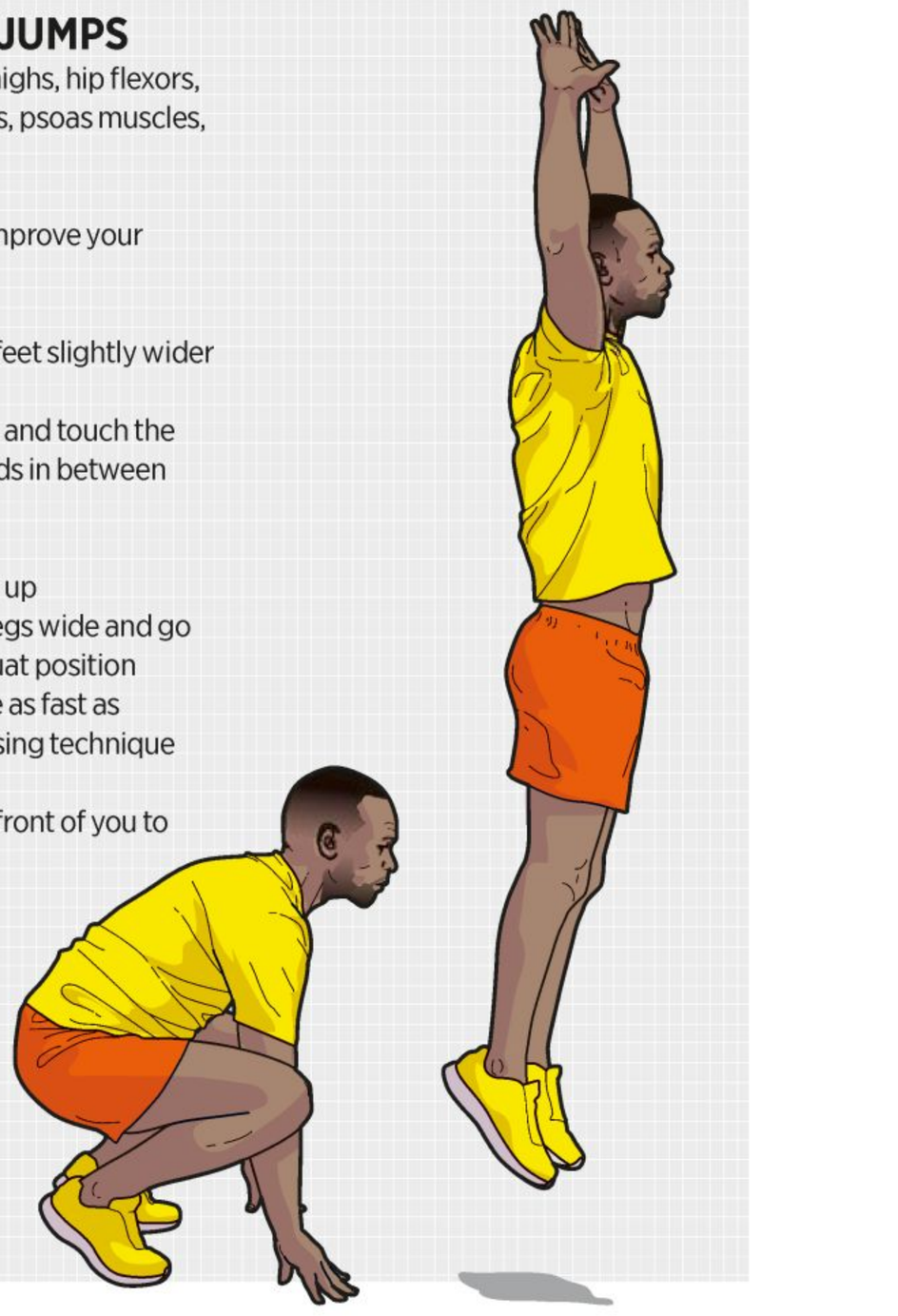
Burn calories and improve your fitness level

Technique:

- Stand with your feet slightly wider than hip-width
- Bend your knees and touch the floor with both hands in between your legs
- Jump up
- Swing your arms up
- Land with your legs wide and go straight into the squat position
- Repeat the move as fast as possible without losing technique

Watch points:

Focus on a point in front of you to prevent dizziness



MAVERICKS

17

PHEIDIPPIDES

Meet the legendary Greek messenger who unwittingly inspired the modern marathon

The original story of the marathon is well known – and, very likely, completely wrong. It goes something like this: a Greek messenger, Pheidippides, ran 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to bring news of the Athenian victory over the invading Persians. Message communicated, he promptly dropped dead from exhaustion.

The real story – or, at least, the one considered by historians to be somewhat more likely – is far more remarkable. It sees our hero, Pheidippides, running from Athens to Sparta, a distance of approximately 150 miles, to ask for the Spartans' help in fighting the Persians. Alas, he was met by crushing news: the Spartans were observing their religious festival and, as a result, refused to set out until the full moon.

This was doubly bad for Pheidippides: not only was he without the Spartans' support, he also had to run all the way back to deliver the bad news.

Fortunately, Pheidippides – or so the legend goes – met with the god Pan on the return leg. Pan told him to ask the Athenians why they paid him no attention, in spite of his friendliness towards them and the fact that he had often been useful to them in the past, and would be so again in the future.

In return for the Athenian's renewed respect towards him, Pan fought alongside them and, despite them being hopelessly outnumbered, helped them to drive back the Persians to their ships. It was a stunning victory – but neither the battle nor the running ceased there.

RUNNING BATTLE

The Persians had a new plan: to sail around Cape Sounion to arrive on the beach at Phaleron and march on an undefended Athens. The trip would take the boats between eight to 10 hours. Some suggest this was Pheidippides' cue to start running again: this time from Marathon to Athens to warn the Athenians that the Persian fleet was on its way. It is this journey that may account for the legendary 26-mile run of Pheidippides. He was, indeed, running back to announce victory, but also to warn his people about another attack. And he did, very possibly, die along the way, likely from accumulative exhaustion.

Behind him, the battle-weary Athenians had to do some running of their own if they were to get to Phaleron before the Persians. Exhausted, bloodied, and carrying their weapons and wounded, the Athenians nonetheless made the 26-mile journey, arriving just an hour or so before the first Persian ships.

The Persians were rightly stunned when they saw the beaches lined with thousands of Greeks ready for battle. And, despite still being stronger in number, the Persians decided better of it and turned their ships around.

SPARTATHLON

The 'Men of Marathon' were heralded as heroes, as much for their running as their fighting, and the tale of Pheidippides came to symbolise the greatness of soldiers and the role of the deities.

While Pheidippides is best known for having inspired the modern marathon, his running heroics are also replicated each year at the Spartathlon. A 153-mile race from Athens to Sparta, with a strict cut-off time of 36 hours, the race aims to retrace the footsteps of the great Greek messenger. Starting life in 1983, it now attracts ultrarunners the world over and is considered one of the most prestigious – not to mention preposterously difficult – footraces in the world. A fitting tribute, then, to Pheidippides: the world's first true running hero. MR

"PHEIDIPPIDES RAN FROM ATHENS TO SPARTA, A DISTANCE OF APPROXIMATELY 150 MILES"

Words Rick Pearson
Illustration thinkstockphotos.co.uk

FACTFILE

Name: Pheidippides
Athletic ability: ★★★★★
Best achievement: Unwittingly inspiring the modern marathon
Maverick factor: ★★★★★

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Rick and Dick Hoyt, the father-and-son team who wouldn't let disability get in the way of achieving their dreams

THE RUNNERS OF RAPA NUI

Easter Island does running like you've never seen it before. Don't let the bananas fool you though – it's fierce, competitive and a deeply rooted part of Rapa Nui culture, as **Matt Maynard** finds out

Once upon a time, somewhere in Polynesia, there existed a faraway and troubled kingdom known as Hiva. One night, while the king was sleeping, he was visited in his dreams by a priest. The priest's name was Hau-Maka and he showed the king a new promised land, safe from the disasters befalling his kingdom. Next morning the king sent his bravest and strongest scouts into the Pacific Ocean to find the land they would call Te Pito 'o te Kāinga – The Centre of the Earth, known today as Easter Island.

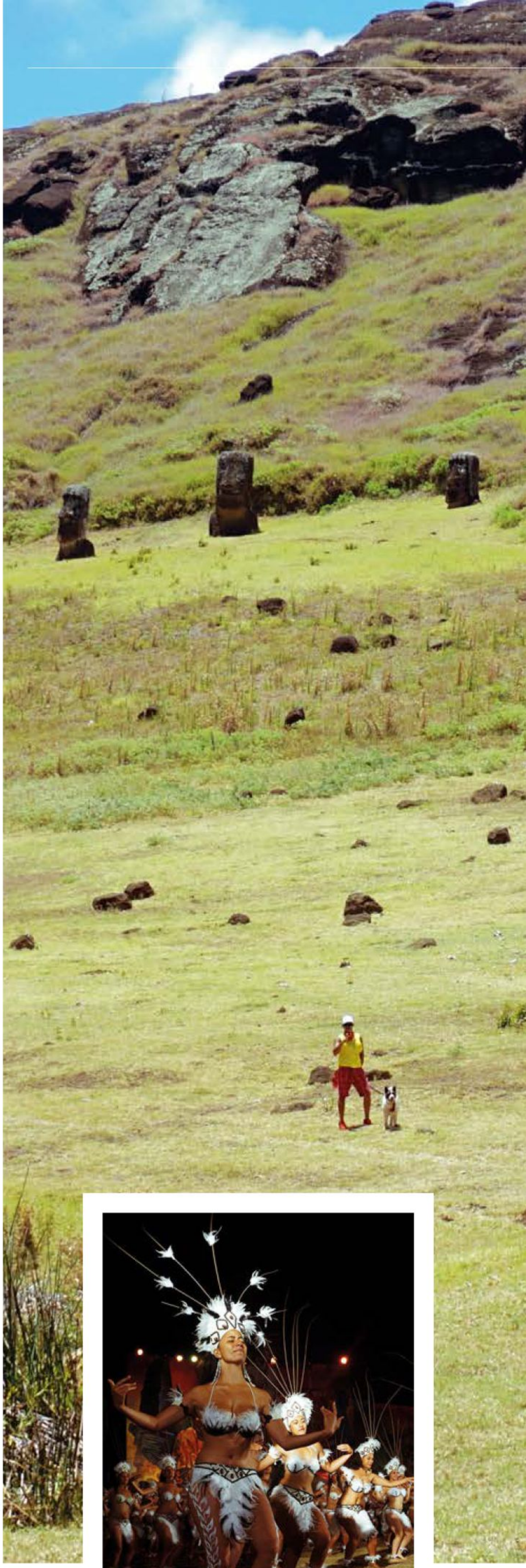
Legend doesn't say what hardships those scouts endured or where indeed the kingdom of Hiva was located. But wherever the first people of Easter Island came from, we can be sure they travelled at least 2,000K from the nearest land. They adventured by canoe and navigated by starlight – making this ancient journey one of the most incredible endurance feats the world has ever seen.

The locals, known today as the Rapa Nui, have an annual February festival called Tapati. It's a cultural celebration of dance, drama, music, handicraft and, perhaps most importantly, sport. Was it possible that the athleticism of those ancient first arrivals still coursed through its modern day people? I knew I had to find out for myself.

MEETING THE ATHLETES

After a five-hour flight from Santiago, Chile I landed in the hot, wet streets of Easter Island's only town, Hanga Roa. I had arrived in time for the first of the sports events – He Tau'a – a race that takes place beside an emerald green lake within a spectacular volcanic crater.

For the last four months, the athletes had dedicated themselves exclusively to training. They lived a hermit-like existence in a makeshift hut at the foot of the volcano. Their mornings were often occupied by collecting reeds to weave the boats they were to use during the race. Other times they would need to fish for food, hunting eels in the rock pools using mangai hooks traditionally made from the bone of a human hip. At midday they would train using sandbags to recreate the »



Photography Matt Maynard

Left to right: a runner makes his way round the famous lake; celebrations in full swing; white flags mark the course

weight of the 20kg banana bunches they would carry while running. By night they would drink imported protein shakes and dream of success during the Tapati fortnight. It seemed an incredibly tough, macho existence with little space for family and children.

I saw the first competitor as he burst from the water, discarding his totora boat on the bank. Running barefoot and in only a loincloth, he charged towards the bananas – the shark tattoo on his leg gnashing its teeth back and forth with every powerful stride. The crowds screamed as he swung the cumbersome weight over his shoulders, the pulse of the Polynesian drumming becoming feverish.

Somewhere on the back straight, the runners each picked up a support runner who could be heard shouting encouragement as they closed the mile loop around the lake. As they discarded the fruit, the runners' biceps quivered. An unburdened return leg remained to the far side of the lake on foot. Here they launched into the water on another reed craft, and hand-paddled back across. It was all over for the fastest athletes in just over 17 minutes.

COMPETITIVE INSTINCT

Before the next event, I took the chance to explore the island on foot and find out more about the athletic history of the Rapa Nui. The obvious challenge was running up Maunga Terevaka, the island's highest summit at 511m. Climbing its grassy flanks, I could see coastal trails weaving around the island and the famous Moai statues on the shore, backdropped by screens of white ocean surf. How these statues of up to 80 tonnes were dragged

Left to right: a runner with traditional Rapa Nui facepaint; supporters and members of the press tail a frontrunner; some of the mysterious Moai sculptures

into place from the 12th Century onwards still baffles modern engineers. Some of the islanders claim a magical life force they call "mana" made them walk into position.

After a five-mile jog on a winding mountain, I found out more at the sacred stronghold of Orongo. Here in the 1700s, the Rapa Nui founded a new cult, worshipping muscle and testosterone in place of their ancestors represented by the Moai. Once a year, they would hold the Birdman contest. The strongest warriors from each tribe would run across jagged rocks, scramble down sea cliffs and then swim to the outlying island of Motu Nui. Several competitors died annually. But the first to successfully return from the island with the uncrushed egg of a sooty tern would be crowned king for the successive year. A sort of cross between *Mortal Kombat* and an Easter egg hunt.

LET BATTLE COMMENCE

Echoes of the Birdman competition can still be found in the warlike races held today. I watched a week later as body-painted runners assembled at the port shortly after sunrise. The shark-tattooed runner was there, and out for blood after losing his advantage at the volcano run and finishing third. His team of runners were stretched out at 500m intervals along the island's shore, dressed in loincloths and shiny new Nike trainers.

I pursued the runners by bicycle, jostled among grunting war cries and chasing mopeds. At the first changeover there was a police roadblock to stop car traffic, but chaos broke out as bikes and bananas clattered into the officers and vehicles. The road then became quieter. Stray dogs joined us. Tourists were startled from their sea-view breakfast – the Rapa Nui a wave of lactic acid, bananas and body paint.

Victory fell to the shark-tattooed runner's team. His name, I had now learnt, was Hau-Maka. When the last of the runners had arrived, the Rapa Nui retreated to a cave set back from the finish where they could pick over the race and look out at the endless horizon.

I had been with Rapa Nui runners for almost two weeks. It was clear they were exceptional athletes. And yet, as I watched Hau-Maka gesture wildly and speak in Rapa Nui, I thought there was perhaps something about them I could never understand. A magic that belonged to Hau-Maka's namesake, the priest. To the scouts who made the journey across the waves. And their descendants for generations ever after. MR

RUNNERS OF RAPA NUI BY NUMBERS

5,035	The population of Easter Island
3,686	The distance in kms from continental Chile to Easter Island
160	The size of Easter island in sq. kms
120	The number of days the most committed runners train in isolation
21.6	The size in metres of the largest Moai "El Gigante" that was never erected
20	The weight in kgs of the bananas the runners carry
17	The number of days the Tapati festival lasted in 2016

Inset: Paula Radcliffe's farewell London Marathon performance in 2015 saw her take it easy – and get a time most of us mere mortals can only dream of
Main: A wall of noise greets runners during last year's London Marathon

Telling everybody you know that you're planning to run a marathon in less than three hours – or any landmark time, for that matter – is a bit like telling everyone you're writing a novel: they'll keep asking you about it every time they see you and it will be embarrassingly obvious that you haven't done it. But a pointless running goal shared is a pointless running goal halved, right? So here I am, in print, telling an even wider audience that I'm aiming to run the 2016 London Marathon in 2:59:59 at least. Anything with a '3' in front of it will be absolutely devastating.

I say "pointless" because there's no practical need to run 26.2 miles in less than 180 minutes. To secure a Good for Age (GFA) place at London, if you're a man under 40, you need to have run a marathon in less than 3:05. If you're between 40 and 50, it's 3:15.

And even those numbers are fairly arbitrary. London only changed its qualifying time for under-40s from 3:15 to 3:05 in 2013, but in earlier days it was 2:45. "The GFA system is a mechanism that allows us to take the maximum number of runners into the event, and the best runners of all ages," says event director Hugh Brasher. "The qualifying times have no bearing on what people would like to run, or aspire to run, since our experience is that every runner has their own goal."

So why go for under three hours? "It's daft, isn't it, really?" says Jonathan Bean, a 30-year-old charity worker from Southampton who managed sub-3 on his fifth attempt, finishing the Seville Marathon in 2:59:12 in 2015. "But it's about how you want to identify yourself. To do three hours and one second would feel vastly less satisfying than doing 2:59:59."

WHAT'S IT 2 YOU?

He's right that there's just something inherently pleasing about the number. It's a crossing of a crevasse, in the same way that the 60 seconds either side of midnight on New Year's Eve feels like a far more significant passage of time than the everyday ticking away of the minutes of your life. Round numbers are more satisfying to break, so maybe you've also aimed to come in under 20 minutes for a 5K, 40 minutes for a 10K, and perhaps 1:30 for a half-marathon. But a sub-three marathon is a lot harder, and therefore a lot more rewarding.

Having a '2' in front of your marathon PB would feel like a promotion to the Premier League, putting you, however tenuously, in the same class as world record holder Dennis Kimetto (2:02:57) rather than the masses who can manage 3:59 and under. At London last year, of the 37,604 participants in the main Club, Charity and Ballot category, just 1,891 – that's five per cent – completed the course in less than two hours. It's definitely an elite club to join. »

"HAVING A '2' IN FRONT OF YOUR MARATHON PB WOULD FEEL LIKE A PROMOTION TO THE PREMIER LEAGUE, PUTTING YOU, HOWEVER TENUOUSLY, IN THE SAME CLASS AS WORLD RECORD HOLDER DENNIS KIMETTO"

Photography ©London Marathon

IN SEARCH OF SUB-3

Arbitrary as it is, the sub-3 marathon retains a magical appeal. But how hard is it? **David Smyth** investigates

Shelter

"I BUILT UP TO GOING OUT ON NO BREAKFAST, WITH NO FOOD AND WATER, JUST TO GET USED TO THE IDEA OF FEELING ABSOLUTELY KNACKERED AND SHIT"

Everyone I speak to has different ideas about how sub-three can be achieved, but one thing we're all agreed on is that it isn't easy. "Going sub-3 is where things get a little more technical," says Will Usher, head coach at Precision Coaching, who helps Gordon Ramsay to get round Iron Man races. During training, he prescribes a long run, a short interval set (short fast distances but lots of them), a longer interval set (high-quality longer distances) and a tempo run at the pace you intend to run the marathon, plus ideally a strength and conditioning session such as pilates, and a recovery session of cycling perhaps. Of all of these, he would avoid putting too much focus on the long run.

NEED FOR SPEED

"People get so hung up on mileage. It's definitely overrated," he tells me. He prefers to think about time rather than distance. "If you're targeting three hours or just below, you should work up to about 45 minutes off your target time, so a 2:15 longest run.

The other key issue is diet, most notably a switch to encouraging your body to burn fat as fuel rather than carbohydrates. "You have so many fat cells sitting in your body – you're not going to run out like you do with glycogen," says Dr Krista Austin of Performance & Nutrition Coaching in the US. "On long training runs with my athletes, we'll pull back on the carbs to train the body to deal with as much glycogen depletion as possible and burn fat instead." Uncomfortable training runs on very little fuel are used to push your metabolism. Then, three days prior to your race, Austin advises switching to high-glycemic carbs that are low in fibre. "This is when you can have the gummi bears and the white rice."

During the race itself, Austin suggests two-thirds of a gel every 5K, while Usher proposes a gel every 10K. If you've maintained a steady pace, not going off too fast, and fuelled regularly rather than waiting until you feel like you need it, you shouldn't hit the dreaded wall.

EMBRACE THE PAIN

The runners I speak to who have cracked the three-hour mark certainly punished themselves in the run-up. Jonathan Bean began plotting his Seville sub-three a full 60 weeks before the event. "I built up to going out on no breakfast, with no food and water, and running for several hours, just to get used to the idea of feeling absolutely knackered and shit. I think I'd shirked that kind of run before."

Michael Wiggins, 38, a post-production worker from London, only went sub-3 on his 26th attempt, at Milton Keynes in 2015. He credits his success to the fact that he was actually training for a 100K ultra at the time. "Maybe the high mileage I was doing leading up to Milton Keynes, including a couple of 30 miles runs, helped and made my legs stronger," he says.

So everyone has different theories. The trainers disapprove of my personal strategy – entering a hilly marathon six weeks prior to London in the belief that it'll make London feel like an easy stroll. But if the desire is there, the mental element is ticked off at least, and sub-3 is a compelling goal. And if I do make it, after the celebrations, what else could fill that void? A tenth marathon would be good. How about 50 before I'm 50? That's the funny thing about round numbers: they're meaningless but oh so attractive.

Superhuman effort: Paul Martelletti recorded the speediest time of all the record-breakers at the 2015 London Marathon, crossing the line in 2:30:12 dressed as Spiderman

5 TIPS FOR GOING SUB-3

AIM EVEN LOWER
Don't set out with 2:59 in mind. Aim for 2:56 then small unforseen eventualities, such as needing the loo and high-fiving cheering children, shouldn't ruin your plans.

START IN THE RIGHT PEN AND FOLLOW THE BLUE LINE
You'll waste time and distance dodging and overtaking if you don't start next to runners who are the same speed as you. The blue line painted on the road, marking the shortest route, is also worth following to save valuable seconds.

SWITCH THE CARBS
Just before the race, move from complex carbs and their slow-release energy to simple white bread, rice and pasta. "The last thing you want is something that's difficult to break down sitting in your stomach," says Will Usher.

IMPROVE YOUR HIP EXTENSION
Your hip flexors dictate how far back your legs can go when you run. If you improve that angle you should be able to go further with every stride. An exercise called the Thomas Flexor Stretch, easily found on YouTube, will help.

SPEED IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN MILEAGE
"The long run is essential but it's not what will make you fast," says Usher, stressing that your interval sets are the sessions that will best help towards a quick time. "You don't want endurance to deflect from the hardcore quality stuff."

ARE YOU

Illustration thinkstockphotos.co.uk

MARANOID?

"DO AID STATIONS HAVE LEMSIP?"

With spring marathons looming, 'maranoia' is now in full swing. **Isaac Williams** takes a closer look at the condition affecting runners everywhere

Anxiety can be a strange thing. Often, you know full well that your worries are unfounded and, in some cases, completely absurd. Unfortunately, if anything, the knowledge of your irrationality only serves to heighten it: you start to think about why you're thinking the way you're thinking and that's too much thinking for anyone. Don't you think?

If you've ever suffered from maranoia – the pre-marathon anxiety that you're ill, injured or undertrained – you'll know this feeling all too well. Read the following four tales of pre-marathon woe to help to put your own fears into context.

"EVERY MUSCLE WAS ACHING, MY HEAD WAS POUNDING AND I THOUGHT I WOULDN'T MAKE IT TO THE START"

PATIENT NO.1
Name: Danny Fletcher
Age: 37
Lives: Newcastle

"Two weeks prior to last year's Greater Manchester Marathon, I developed a bit of a sniffle – but maranoia turned this into a full-on case of man flu. As the marathon drew closer, every muscle felt like it was aching, my head was pounding and I thought I wouldn't make it to the start line, never mind run the 26.2 miles. I spent a small fortune at the supermarket, buying various medications trying to fight off the cold.

Remarkably, I woke up on the morning of the race and absolutely everything was fine: no aches, no sniffles, and I managed to finish the marathon in under four hours – a massive personal best. Truth be told, I probably gave myself half the symptoms by overdosing on cold and flu capsules."

© York 10K

"THESE SHOES ARE ALL WRONG"

PATIENT NO.2
Name: Rick Pearson
Age: 31
Lives: London

"I suffered from a bad stint of maranoia before the 2015 London Marathon. It manifested itself in panic trainer-buying. I'll explain... About a month before the race, 16 miles into one of my final long runs, my left foot began to hurt. Up until this point, I'd been doing all my running in a pair of very minimal Mizuno Levitas. This, I decided, was the root of my problem. So I went online and started purchasing cushioned shoe after cushioned shoe. Nothing worked and, more worryingly, my foot still hurt.
By this point, I was convinced it must be broken. I went to see a sports physio and braced myself for the bad news.
But it turned out there was nothing much wrong with my foot, just a bit of very minor bruising. I was cleared to run but there was still time to buy one more pair of shoes – some Altra One2s – at the London Marathon Expo. In the end, I failed to run a sub-three marathon not because of my phantom injury or untested shoes, but my lack of miles in training. I'll be back again next year, and if you see me testing out a pair of new shoes at the Expo, call the doctor."

PATIENT NO.3
Name: James Sadlier
Age: 38
Lives: Peterborough

"My training for the London Marathon last year had gone perfectly – until the day before, when my IT band suddenly felt 'wrong'. It was incredibly tight and I couldn't do anything to shake the feeling. Everyone told me it was in my head, but I wouldn't believe them. I had a rough night's sleep before the big day as it was really worrying me. I stretched and had an Epsom Salts bath. Nothing worked.

As soon as I set off running, though, it all disappeared. I felt good, I found my stride. All the stress felt unnecessary after that. I ran a PB by about 30 minutes and felt elated. I had the 'I told you so' from everyone afterwards and I now remind myself of that every time I have a 'wobbly' before a race. The best prep is to calm yourself down."

"ACT CALM, JAMES!"

© The Great Newham London Run

"I SUFFERED FROM MARANOIA THAT MANIFESTED ITSELF IN PANIC TRAINER-BUYING"

"MUST GET TICKET, MUST GET TICKET"

PATIENT NO.4
Name: Sam Langdon
Age: 37
Lives: Steyning

"The day before the 2014 Brighton Marathon, I spontaneously developed a potentially show-stopping knee pain. I also became concerned about there being a huge queue of marathoners at the train station I was going to travel to Brighton from in the morning. As a result, I drove a 30-minute round trip to the station to buy a ticket for the next day. When I got to the ticket office, it was unmanned and the machine wasn't selling next-day tickets that early. I drove home in a fluster and, two hours later, I did the same trip again, limping to the machine and, much to my relief, getting my ticket.

"When I arrived at the station the next morning – hoping to wave my ticket smugly at the massive queue of runners – not only was there no queue, but the barriers were open so I could have just bought a ticket on the train.

In the end, I got to the race on time, my knee gave me no more grief and I finished triumphantly with a PB of 3hrs 22mins. If I could give one piece of advice to fellow maranoia sufferers, it would be two words: chill out." MR

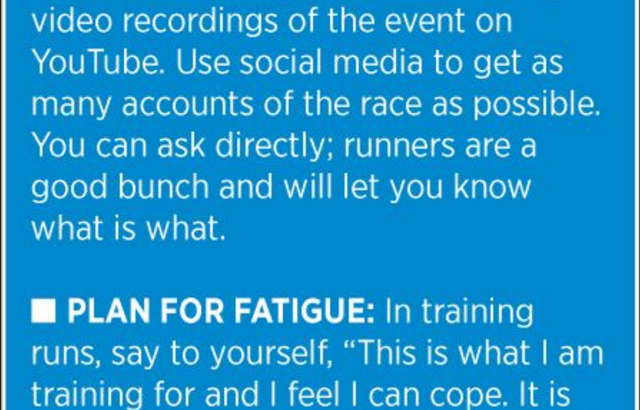
"I SPONTANEOUSLY DEVELOPED A POTENTIALLY SHOW-STOPPING KNEE PAIN"

© thinkstockphotos.co.uk

MARANOIA:

the irrational fear of something going wrong before a marathon

RECOMMENDED TREATMENTS



Professor Andy Lane is a sport and exercise psychologist, and avid runner with a marathon PB of 2:57. Follow his expert advice to arrive at the start line in the best possible frame of mind.

■ **RESEARCH:** Look at the course, look at the hill profile and look when the drinks will be given. Imagine yourself running the event, going over the hills, taking drinks, etc. Get a clear idea of what is coming. There are usually video recordings of the event on YouTube. Use social media to get as many accounts of the race as possible. You can ask directly; runners are a good bunch and will let you know what is what.

■ **PLAN FOR FATIGUE:** In training runs, say to yourself, "This is what I am training for and I feel I can cope. It is going to hurt a bit, but that is part of the challenge."

■ **IMAGINE COPING:** Picture yourself running in the event. See yourself coping – performing well, feeling tired, but succeeding. Do this in three-minute clips and immerse yourself in the activity. Note: you should feel nervous when you think about the marathon, and that is good! Think to yourself: "These nerves are telling me this event is important. I can do well and the nerves, just like fatigue, are part of the marathon package."

■ **TUNE IN:** Music is a powerful tool. You can use it beforehand to calm yourself down and get psychologically ready. You don't need pumping up for a marathon, so select tracks that make you feel calm and strong.

■ **FIND YOUR FUEL:** Experiment with energy gels/drinks/bars in training so that, come race day, you know full well what is going to keep you energised. Just having something that you know can help is a powerful tool.

GET READY FOR THE BRIGHTON MARATHON WEEKEND

For a fantastic seaside celebration of running, head to the Brighton Marathon Weekend

The Brighton Marathon Weekend is a fantastic weekend of running by the sea. Encompassing the Brighton Marathon, BM10K, The Cancer Research UK Kids & Teens Mini Mile Races, and the Brighton Marathon Exhibition, there is something for everyone.

Most unique about the event is its buzzing atmosphere, roaring crowd support and the stunning backdrop of the sea. The BM10K and Brighton Marathon course finish on the spectacular Brighton seafront, in front of hundreds of thousands of cheering spectators. Over 200,000 line the city streets to cheer the runners on, before runners and their supporters reunite at the huge Beach Village to enjoy deck chairs, large screens, food, bars and, of course, a dip in the sea to cool those tired feet!

BRIGHTON MARATHON

The star of the show is undoubtedly the Brighton Marathon, which is now one of the UK's favourite 26.2 milers. It has become the 12th largest European marathon in just six years, and attracts runners from all around the world. Over 10,000 are expected to take part in the 2016 event.

Each year, runners can sign up with a

The Beach Village

Duncan Maiyo, 24, smashed his personal best to win in 2:10:15

Mini Mile for the little ones

Thumbs up for the post-race atmosphere

general entry place or with a charity place. Hundreds of charities get involved each year and over £35millon has been raised in charity fundraising since 2010.

BM10K

The BM10K sees thousands of people running 10K along the first part of the Brighton Marathon route, and starts at 8.30am, just ahead of the marathon. It is now a hugely popular 10K race in the UK running calendar, offering its participants the chance to experience the electric atmosphere of the Brighton Marathon Weekend without the 26.2-mile distance!

Entries for 2017 will open later in 2016; look out for updates on the website **bm10k.com/home**

CANCER RESEARCH UK KIDS & TEENS MINI MILE RACES

The Cancer Research UK Kids & Teens Mini Mile Races are age-related races that offer fantastic inspiration for children to get outdoors, get active in a fun way and raise money for a fantastic cause.

Taking place the day before the marathon and the 10K and open to seven to 17-year-olds, this is a wonderful opportunity for youngsters to experience the exciting atmosphere of a mass participation race at one of the UK's best youth running events. Over 2,500 children are expected to take part, each covering a one-mile distance while being cheered on by friends and family.

EXHIBITION

The Brighton Marathon Weekend experience begins at the Brighton Marathon Exhibition. Free to enter on the Friday and Saturday, there's something for everyone.

Brimming with things to see, do and buy, you can pick up some amazing bargains from a range of lifestyle and fitness brands, get tips from the experts at the seminars, book a pre-race massage, and get your official event merchandise as a memento of your weekend.

BEACH VILLAGE

The Beach Village is the exciting finale of the weekend. Located directly on the beach adjacent to the finish line, this area stretches over 500m and contains charity marquees, bar areas, a street food market, giant screens and a huge chill-out zone with deck chairs and picnic benches.

Runners exit onto the beach after their race, where they can reunite with loved ones and celebrate their 10K or marathon finish. The Beach Village is for both leg-weary runners and proud supporters to enjoy!

ENTER THE 2017 BRIGHTON MARATHON

Entries for the 2017 Brighton Marathon go on general sale on Sunday 17 April – supply will be limited so don't delay!
Or, if you are in the area on 15-16 April, visit the Brighton Marathon Exhibition at the Brighton Centre to sign up for an exclusive discounted entry.
brightonmarathon.co.uk

Brighton Marathon WEEKEND

FIND OUT MORE: For all of the latest news follow the Brighton Marathon on **facebook.com/brightonmarathonofficial** and **twitter.com/brightonmarathn**. Visit the website for further details at **brightonmarathonweekend.co.uk**.

MEET THE EXPERTS

NUTRITION: High5
Raphael Deinhart
High 5's technical and marketing coordinator is a former elite-level cyclist. His performance experience means he's perfectly placed to provide indispensable advice on pre-, mid- and post-exercise nutrition.
highfive.co.uk

COACH: Full Potential
Ben Barwick
Ben is a biomechanics expert and running coach. He loves seeing the progression of those he coaches, and his detailed training plans will deliver the gents to the start line in the form of their lives.
fullpotential.co.uk

KIT: Asics
Michael Moore
Michael is a technical representative with a deep knowledge of running apparel. Together with the team at Asics, he'll help the gents to get the most out of their kit and pick the shoes best for them.
asics.co.uk

PHYSIO: Pure Sports Medicine
Ellie Williams
Ellie is a physiotherapist and sports fanatic. She'll be on hand to help each of the guys to build a fitter, healthier and more balanced body – and hopefully get to the start line injury-free.
puresportsmed.com

Photography Eddie Macdonald

BIG MARATHON CHALLENGE

ALL THE RANGE

From growing old competitively to avoiding rabid dogs in Africa, the Big Marathon Challenge team have been busy this month. Here's how they've been getting on...

The Big Marathon Challenge team are an eclectic bunch. Comprising a speedy sixty-something, mental health advocate, globe-trotter and running newbie, our awesome foursome each have their own hurdles to overcome in their journey towards their respective marathons. This month, as the mileage ramps up, Gary Brazier and Adrian Reynolds headed to the Asics store for a gait analysis, Jean-Marc Knoll struggled with soaring temperatures and open sewers in African, and Jack Davies reflected on why, at 63, he developed a passion for running long distances. Enjoy! »

Name: Adrian Reynolds
Age: 34
Marathon: Brighton
In a nutshell: Inspiring mental health advocate who finds peace in running

You recently had your gait analysed at the Asics store. What did you know about gait analysis beforehand?
I knew about the different types of shoes and why some runners need more cushioning, but I hadn't seen the detail that a proper gait analysis goes into. In the past I'd relied on reading about shoe types online, working out what type of gait I had for myself and – I imagine, like a lot of people – relying largely on trial and error. I've run marathons in neutral shoes and structured support shoes, so I've definitely got it wrong at least once!

What did you learn from the day?
I learned that I'm quite severely over-pronating when I run, and more so on one foot than the other. It was interesting to understand the science behind it and see a video of exactly how my feet were landing. I thought I was over-pronating a little but the impact was more extreme than I had anticipated, and I'm actually quite impressed I managed to make it round a marathon in neutral shoes now!

Which shoes have you been recommended as a result?
The Kayano 22. This is one of the most popular shoes for over-pronators and I could feel the difference on the treadmill immediately. Watching the video, the support of the shoe was instantly correcting the way my foot landed to quite a large extent, especially on my right side, which had been over-pronating more.

Would you recommend the experience to others?
I think anyone running regularly over long distances should get a proper gait analysis done. Running a marathon is difficult enough without being in the wrong pair of shoes, and it's very hard to judge what these are merely on how comfortable they feel initially. You're unlikely to notice any problems until the longer runs, by which point you might have already done some damage, or at least slowed yourself down quite considerably.

Follow Adrian on Twitter @adereynolds

COACH SAYS!

Adrian's training has been going very nicely this month. The cold temperatures have slowed his intervals down a bit, but he has been slowly getting faster overall. He also had a weekend run that left him feeling really tired and that carried into the next week. We just reduced his training a bit, as it felt like he was just carrying a bit of extra fatigue, and doing that has seemed to have sharpened him up again.

Name: Jean-Marc Knoll
Age: 41
Marathon: North Korea
In a nutshell: Restless wanderer currently travelling through Africa

What have been the challenges of training in Africa?

Quite simply, the heat. I much prefer cooler temperatures so having to run in sub-tropical conditions and 30°C has been the biggest challenge. The only way around this has been to run at sunrise. I had also been concerned by wild dogs and the possibility of rabies, but I have not come across any so far. Running alongside open sewers, however, has been a real challenge to my nostrils!

Have you been joined by local runners?

Yes – and this has been one of the most enjoyable aspects. From my first run in Cape Town to my most recent in the valleys of Swaziland, I have bumped into and joined local runners almost every time. It has been fantastic to be able to follow someone and not have to think about a route to run. I have also met fellow runners in backpacker hostels, and they have been even more excited to have a temporary partner. I thought I would be running on my own in Africa, but that has definitely not been the case.

Where's the best place you've run?

Cape Town's seafront was spectacular, but my favourite run so far was on the windswept Atlantic coastline at Swakopmund in Namibia. Running on the coastal road with the waves crashing onto the beach to my right and huge red desert sand dunes to my left was truly inspirational – even if I had to dodge the odd HGV every now and then!

What kind of food have you been eating?

Nutrition has definitely been a challenge. Cooking has rarely been an option as I have been on the move the whole time, so I have had to rely on salads or grilled chicken when eating out in touristy places. Because I am travelling across the entire continent overland,I regularly face bus journeys of up to 12 hours. The buses only stop at petrol stations where the locals gorge on fried chicken, crisps and chocolate. Thankfully I developed an addiction to biltong on my last trip to South Africa, so my transport diet is one of lean beef strips and bottled water. »

COACH SAYS!

This month saw Jean-Marc embark on his travels and the training had to take that into account. He emailed me a few times to let me know how hot it was and how he wasn't able to run the speeds he had been in the UK. I reminded him that's fine: the heat, especially when you aren't acclimatised, will slow you down. Sessions aren't there to prove fitness; as long as you remain patient, the pace will pick up in time.

Name: Gary Brazier
Age: 43
Marathon: London
In a nutshell: Busy father-of-three taking on the challenge of a lifetime

You recently had your gait analysed at the Asics store. What did you know about gait analysis beforehand?
To be fair, not that much. I had a small insight because, when I started running last October, my wife Marie said I should get a gait analysis done before buying a pair of running shoes. I took her advice and headed to Sweatshop in Maidstone where they watched me run on a treadmill, while capturing video footage. After the experience, I was told that I was a neutral runner.

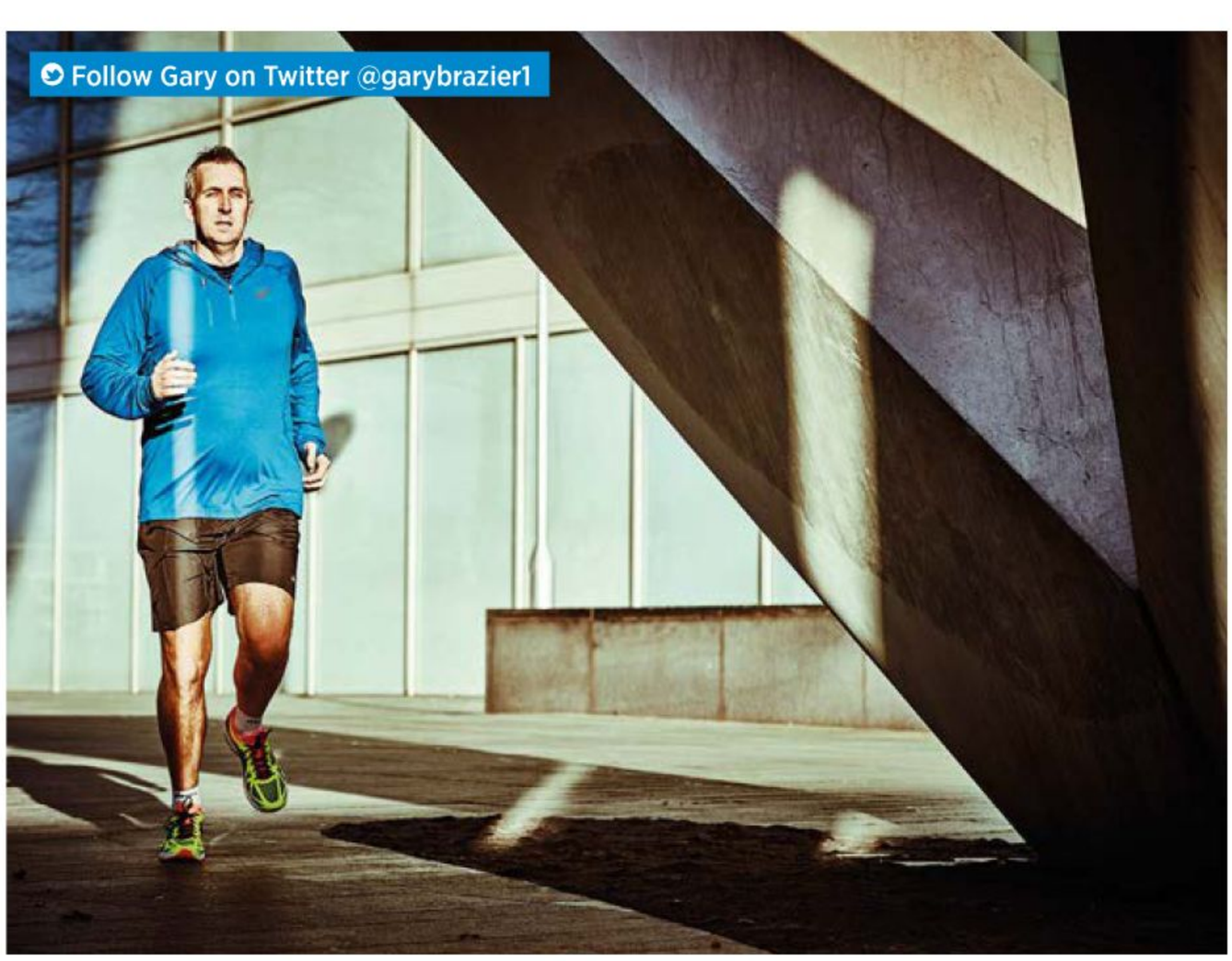
What did you learn from the day?
It was a really good experience, and really interesting. Asics used a 3D image machine to take a photo of my foot; I then had to run on the treadmill using special running shoes, capturing video footage. They then had exact sizes of both my feet, as well as arch height, heel size, foot width, step frequency, step length, etc. Using this information along with my foot landing patterns, they determined what shoe was best for me.

Which shoes have you been recommended as a result?
They decided that the Asics Nimbus 17 in a slightly wide neutral fit would be right for me. I have had concerns regarding my knees due to old football injuries and the impact that running may have on them. Asics listened to this and they informed me that the Nimbus is the most cushioned shoe they have. They look and feel fantastic.

Would you recommend the experience to others?
Yes, most definitely. From the moment I walked into the Asics store, I was really well looked after by their staff. I asked lots of questions regarding the gait analysis and their staff were really knowledgeable and only too happy to explain the process to me. They also gave me a detailed printout of all the data, which I'll be studying closely. It was amazing to see how much information they had captured and the way they use it to find the perfect running shoe for the individual.

COACH SAYS!

Gary did one of the best things any endurance athlete can do this month: he took a day off running and spent it with his family! He also got a bit lost on a long run and took it up to three hours – a huge, if unplanned milestone – and he covered just under 17 miles in the process. Understandly, he found the last few miles tough but got through it and he's well on the way to running a good marathon.



COACH SAYS!

Jack's month involved the Malta Marathon. Not many marathon build-ups include racing a marathon before it – and it certainly isn't best practice – but some people can get away with it. He had the race build-up from hell: missing sleep due to travel, picking up a cold and getting no real rest. He still finished in 3hr 45 mins – a decent time in hot and hilly conditions – putting us in a good position to strike for London.

Name: Jack Davies
Age: 68
Marathon: London
In a nutshell: Speedy sixty-something growing old competitively

JACK DAVIES: WHY I RUN

A number of years ago now, a much younger person asked me why I did all the events that I did at my age. We were, at the time, on a diving expedition in Borneo for six weeks. I had previously done a similar expedition on a coral bay in the Caribbean. I was also doing several charity bike challenges abroad.

The answer was easy. I told him that I just didn't want to be lying on my deathbed some day, wishing that I had done this or that and regretting wasting my time. I no longer dive but the bike rides continue (eight abroad plus Land's End to John O'Groats) and running has taken over much of my life.

It was four days before my 63rd birthday when I had my first race, the Manchester 10K. Two years on, I was first in my age group for the same race. A lot had happened to me in the meantime with regards to my attitude towards running and racing. I found it kept (or got) me fit. I was enjoying the whole experience, especially the competitions (before, during and after the race). I competed against others, the clock and the voice in my head that said I couldn't do it and I should stop. I realised that it lies to me. I also found that I could compete with much younger runners – a joy in itself.

I'm glad I finally had the courage to start running and I urge anyone considering starting to do so. Alternatively, if you are thinking of giving up, have the courage to continue – you won't regret it.

So whatever your age now, don't be afraid of getting old. You'll still do crazy things but, like me, just more slowly. Don't wake up one day and realise there isn't any more time left to do all the things you've always wanted to do. Do them NOW! Make the most of your life while you've got it. MR

"DON'T WAKE UP TO FIND THERE'S NO TIME TO DO ALL THE CRAZY THINGS YOU WANTED TO DO"

GO EPIC!

WIN an all-expenses-paid trip to the iconic **BUFF® Epic Trail** in the mountains of northern Spain

We've teamed up with BUFF® to offer one brave reader the chance to run the BUFF® Epic Trail, an awe-inspiring 42K mountainous trail run in northern Spain, on 22-24 July.

We'll provide a full training plan as well as race entry and transport to and from the event from London Gatwick airport.

To enter this competition you must have some trail running experience, be free from injury and have completed at least a half-marathon distance (21K) in the past without problems.

Your progress will be followed closely in *Men's Running* magazine and online at mensrunninguk.co.uk – you'll need to be willing to put fingers to the keyboard to write about your experiences!

For the chance to win, tell us in 200 words or less why you're dying to take on this epic adventure! Email your entry to **mensrunning@wildbunchmedia.co.uk** by 11pm on 10 April.

For more information on the BUFF® Epic Trail, visit ***buffepictrail.com***

BUFF® EPIC TRAIL AIGÜESTORTES

© Elena Mate / BUFF® Epic Trail

MAY

TRAIL ZONE

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© Jose Andres Vargas / The Coastal Challenge

WHY ROAD RACES ARE OVERRATED

Road marathon season is upon us, but die-hard trail fan **Ceri Rees** says they have nothing on their off-road equivalent. Here's why...

EXPERT ADVICE

Ceri Rees is an ex-international athlete and trail running expert. He is the founder of Wild Running, offering trail running and mountaineering experiences for all abilities.

While we are in the middle of a running boom, the popularity of road marathons appears to be in decline, at least in the UK. Perhaps it is the realisation that there are new, more inspiring challenges out there.

A Danish researcher, Jens Jakob Andersen, from Copenhagen Business School, analysed participation rates across the world, as well as in different countries. His analysis shows that there was a 5% decrease in marathon running in the UK between 2009 and 2014.

True, last year there were 37,800 London entries for the Virgin Money London Marathon. But more than 55% of entries for 2016 are first-timers, who may never run another one. In the UK, men's marathon participation decreased by 13%. Why could this be?

1. WE'RE NOT VERY GOOD AT THEM

Sad fact: us Brits are not especially good at road marathons. Truth be told, we're the second slowest nation in Europe. Last year, UK men's average finishing time was 4hrs 13mins 23secs, while women's was 4hrs 42mins 33secs. Only Greece is slower. What Brits seem to be good at is fundraising and dressing up. Both admirable skills, but the fact remains: we're rubbish on the road.

2. THEY'RE SO BUSY

If small is beautiful, you are on to a loser with a city marathon, as small scale simply doesn't exist. Big city marathons now routinely attract 20,000 runners and more than 100,000 spectators. Yes, that lends them a certain grandeur, but it also makes them overwhelming. The trails, by contrast, are remote, relaxing and far less congested. I know where I'd rather be.

3. THE SCENERY ISN'T INSPIRING

Without wanting to name names, there are several marathons held in major British conurbations not renowned for their scenery. Yet running a road marathon seems to provide everyone with rose-tinted spectacles, through which grey asphalt and 1970s architecture become things of rare beauty. I know a regular marathon runner, for instance, who described the Amsterdam Marathon as "like running round a supermarket car park" – yet she's run the race three times. Deny yourself no longer: head to the hills for some proper scenery.

4. THEY'RE BRUTAL ON THE BODY

If you compare the recovery time for a road marathon with that of an off-road marathon, the difference is startling. While you may be a bit sore for a few days after a trail marathon, the chances are you'd be ready for another within a month. Road marathoners, by contrast, are lucky if they can fit in two a year.

The reason for this is well documented: the impact and stress on the joints is considerably greater on road than it is on trail. The stride pattern is monotonous and repetitive, which can feel boring and switch off supportive muscles and tissues. I know it has become very fashionable to quote Chris McDougall, but he is on to something in his book *Natural Born Heroes* when he writes, 'By running challenging trails, changing your pace throughout a run and varying your workouts, you can shock your body into becoming more resilient.'

5. THEY'RE ALL ABOUT STATISTICS

I am not belittling people who run road marathons: Paula Radcliffe and Charlie Spedding are among my all-time athletic heroes. For me, though, it's not the most nourishing form of running.

Part of the problem is that data monitoring – beloved of road marathoners the world over – has allowed us all to become amateur analysts obsessed with statistics.

Running should be an art, as well as a science. Practising dumb, repetitive movements on hard surfaces may be a form of training, but it is not a skill. You need to engage your body to complete a trail marathon, which means your core, agility and even upper-body strength get worked.

So if you've missed out on a spring road marathon, do yourself a favour: enter a trail marathon instead, and reap the off-road rewards. MR

Photography thinkstockphotos.co.uk

3 MUST-TRY TRAIL MARATHONS

Hardmoors 26.2, 22 May
A picturesque and hilly pleasure in Osomotherley, North Yorkshire.
hardmoors110.org.uk

The Purbeck Marathon, 18 September
Taking in the Dorset coast, this is billed as "one of the world's most scenic marathons".
thepurbeckmarathon.co.uk

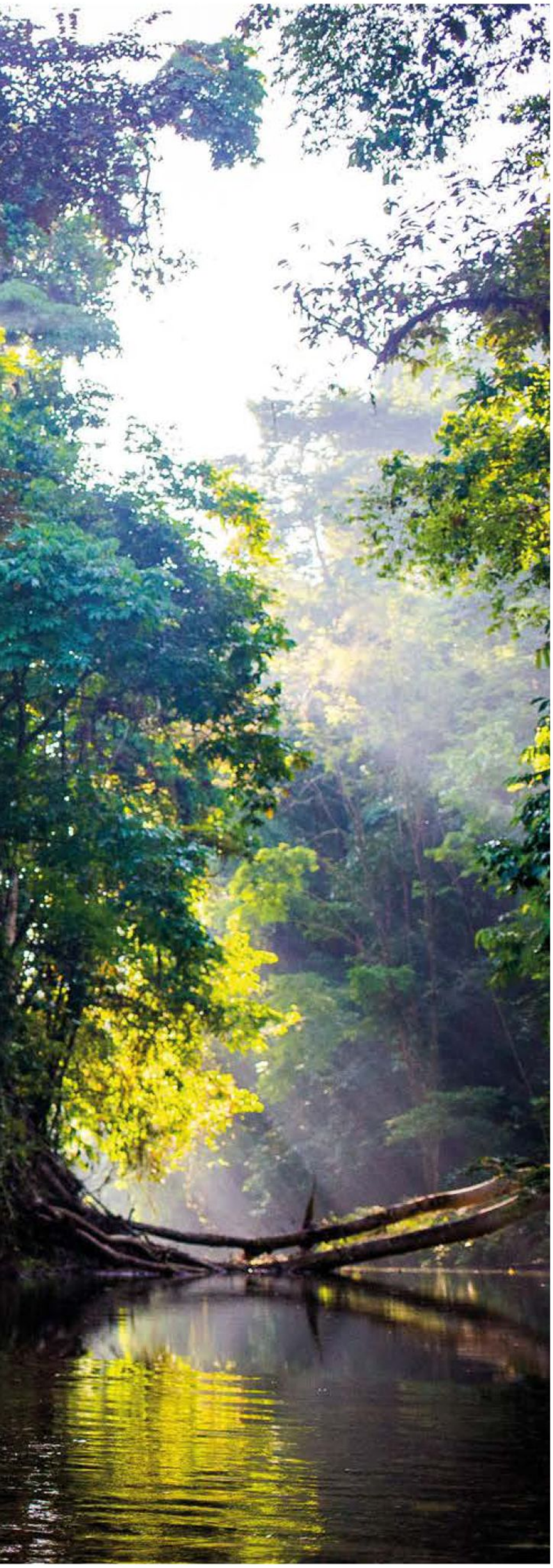
Something Wild Trail Marathon, 12 July
Set in the stunning surroundings of Dartmoor National Park, this is a trail runner's delight.
wildrunning.co.uk

STAGE CRAFT

Damian Hall recently completed The Coastal Challenge, a six-day, 240K race in Costa Rica. As he endured 80% humidity, 40˚C heat and dodged crocodiles, here are the eight lessons he learned about multi-stage racing...

A river runs through it: bracing for a mid-run cool-down

Words Damian Hall
Photography J Andrés Vargas / The Coastal Challenge



A multi-stage race is a dream holiday. Go running somewhere spectacular most of the day, stuff your cakehole with top nosh in the evening, hang out with like-minded folk, sleep, get up and repeat day after day.

Morocco's Marathon des Sables (MdS) is the most famous multi-stage race, but there are many others, usually in spectacular, exotic places such as the six-day, 240K The Coastal Challenge (TCC) in Costa Rica, which I completed in February – and absolutely loved.

You end up with a lot more Facebook friends after a multi-stage race because you have time to socialise as your body recovers. That infectious camaraderie builds as you share stories of your day's (mis)adventures over dinner each night and, when your body is sternly instructing you to find the nearest sofa instead, it can be what pushes you onwards.

However, running consecutively for several days is challenging physically and mentally. Here's what I've learned about multi-stage racing...

DO YOUR RESEARCH

For a race abroad you need to think about all aspects of travel, including the dreaded Vs: vaccinations and visas. I lazily assumed I didn't need a visa for the US as I was only in transit there for three hours and had a ticket on to Costa Rica. I learnt at Heathrow that I did. Luckily it could be applied for online and is usually granted in minutes – but can take up to three days. However, in a classic "computer says no" scenario, a frozen smartphone screen and an unfinished application I couldn't re-access had me stuck in bureaucratic limbo hell. After a stressful hour, including meeting a US immigration official, it was finally sorted. It didn't affect my race in the end, but I could have missed it altogether.

At least one elite runner at TCC thought below-par performances early in the race were due to recent vaccinations, so look into those well in advance, too.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

The things you do when not racing can be as important as the racing itself. "It's vital to look after yourself," says South African Iain Don-Wauchope, TCC winner in both 2015 and 2016. "By that I mean, hydrating and replenishing your fuel stores soon after a day's racing, and getting enough sleep so you're as recovered as possible for the next day. Don't forget sunscreen and look after yourself hygienically. Illness and bugs can quickly spread around camp and it's awful to be taken out of a race for non-running reasons."

CREATURE COMFORTS

My younger self would be disgusted with the middle-aged me, but I packed a huge Therm-a-Rest travel pillow. And a really comfy Therm-a-Rest Evolute sleeping mat. Anything you can do to get better sleep and let muscles repair can pay dividends. I also got a massage when my legs felt sore.

Consider food to be part of your creature comforts arsenal, too. I brought some of my favourite snacks along, for both racing and post-race. At TCC the food was fantastic, but you will need to »

"IN COSTA RICA THEY SAY 'PURE LIFE'. THAT'S THE WAY TO SEE THINGS DURING A MULTI-STAGE RACE"

replenish a lot of calories, and familiarity in a foreign place can be comforting. I also took an iPod and a book. I was on holiday, after all. Talking of which...

PURA VIDA

"Forget your place in the race and your split times," says Ecuadorian Gonzalo Calisto, who, er, placed second at the 2016 TCC. "A few years later you won't remember those things. But you will remember the people you met, the great scenery and the experiences you had along the way. In Costa Rica they say, 'pura vida', which roughly translates as 'pure life'. That's the way to try to see things during a multi-stage race."

You may have arrived in a foreign country on your own, but grouped together with like-minded souls it's hard not to make new friends. Don't underestimate the power of camaraderie.

PUT YOUR FEET UP

Getting foot care wrong can change your multi-stage race from heavenly to hellish. Blisters are usually caused by moisture and friction, so avoid ill-fitting running shoes – worry more about comfort than grip. At TCC I had wet feet most of the day, though, from river crossings. So breathable shoes that would let water out quickly were key and inov-8 Terraclaws worked brilliantly for me. I also used Care Plus Camphor Spray, which adds a protective layer to the skin and is antiseptic, too. I had no blisters at TCC.

Also, rest and sleep with your feet elevated to help prevent swollen feet and ankles from fluid retention.

BE A TORTOISE

At the 2015's five-day Dragon's Back Race, the guy who finished second on day one wasn't in the race by day three. Starting out at a sustainable pace is even more important when racing in the heat. If you overheat, your body will try to stop you by shutting down. At TCC I wanted to be competitive, but also knew the first day in the heat might be the toughest as my body acclimatised. The race started with a tantalising 15K of flat, though, making it hard mentally to hold back. I scurried along at a decent pace initially, but when it became a struggle I dropped from 7min/miles to 8min/miles. I placed eighth on day one, but higher every day after, finishing fifth overall.

ACCLIMATISE AND TRAIN SPECIFICALLY

"You need to be fit," says Elisabet Barnes – a coach and runner who specialises in multi-day races in hot environments, placing first at the 2015 MdS and second at 2016's TCC – "but this depends on the environment you'll race in, so train specifically for the race format, terrain, climate and other unique challenges. If the terrain is hilly, technical, muddy or sandy, mirror that in your training. Occasional back-to-back runs are good for getting the body used to the demands of multi-stage racing, but don't over-do them as you risk starting the race fatigued. Both MdS and TCC are hot, but one is dry and the other humid. In both cases, acclimatising beforehand will help your performance. Arriving at the race destination early is great, but acclimatising in a heat chamber is a good alternative. Bikram yoga or running with extra layers on can also prompt adaptions in your body."

BE ECONOMICAL

"Train yourself to be more economical," says Portugal's Ester Alves, women's winner of the 2016 TCC. "In training, do fasted sessions to teach your body to go longer without food and drink. This will mean you can carry less during a race and therefore go lighter and faster." These may seem like tips for elite runners, and there are some obvious risk involved. But the fear of the unknown in inexperienced multi-stage runners often makes them carry too much equipment and food. Excess weight makes runners slower, meaning they're out on the course longer which, in turn, increases the chance of things going wrong for them.

3 TOP UK MULTI-STAGE RACES

You can still have a great running holiday right here in Blighty. These are ideal as warm-ups to test kit, fitness and nutrition.

GREAT LAKELAND 3DAY

greatlakeland3day.com

- Three days, varying distances
- May

Beginner-friendly, with your kit transported onto the next camp for you and less demanding navigation than most mountain marathons. Superb for testing equipment and recovery strategies, while getting super fit in the Lakeland fells.

DRAGON'S BACK RACE

dragonsbackrace.com

- Five days, approx 190 miles
- May (2017)

Britain's most gruelling and greatest multi-stage race follows mountain tops from the north to the south of Wales, with a whopping 16,000m of ascent. A spectacular, very well organised, once-in-a-lifetime race.

THE DRUIDS CHALLENGE RIDGEWAY

xnrg.co.uk

- Three days, 84 miles
- November

An entry-level ultra along the Ridgeway National Trail. Despite the likely weather, it's popular with future MdS contestants.

United we stand: Costa Rica's Marcelo Jimenez (left) and Spain's Raul Riudavets Gomila at the Nauyaca waterfall on day three of the race

MADE IN BRITTON

*Team GB 24hr runner **Robbie Britton** guides you through all things ultra*

THE ART OF RUNNING DOWNHILL

Everyone worries about how many thousands of feet they have to run up in an ultra race, but they forget that the uphills are unlikely to end your race. It's the descents that will write DNF next to your name. They're the real killers.

Running uphill may be exhausting, and you'll always have mountain goats whizzing past you when you're feeling your weakest, but you can invariably keep going. Running downhill, on the other hand, can end your day in a number of ways, including tripping you up and sending you flying face-first.

Preparing the leg muscles for those downhills, especially if like me you weren't born and bred in the high mountains, is key for any hilly ultra. It is as – or even more – important than getting ready for the ups.

It may not be easy if you live in Central London or the flatlands of Norfolk, but there is always a hill to find if you look hard enough. The smallest incline can spawn forth a valuable hill session if you put in the right amount of effort.

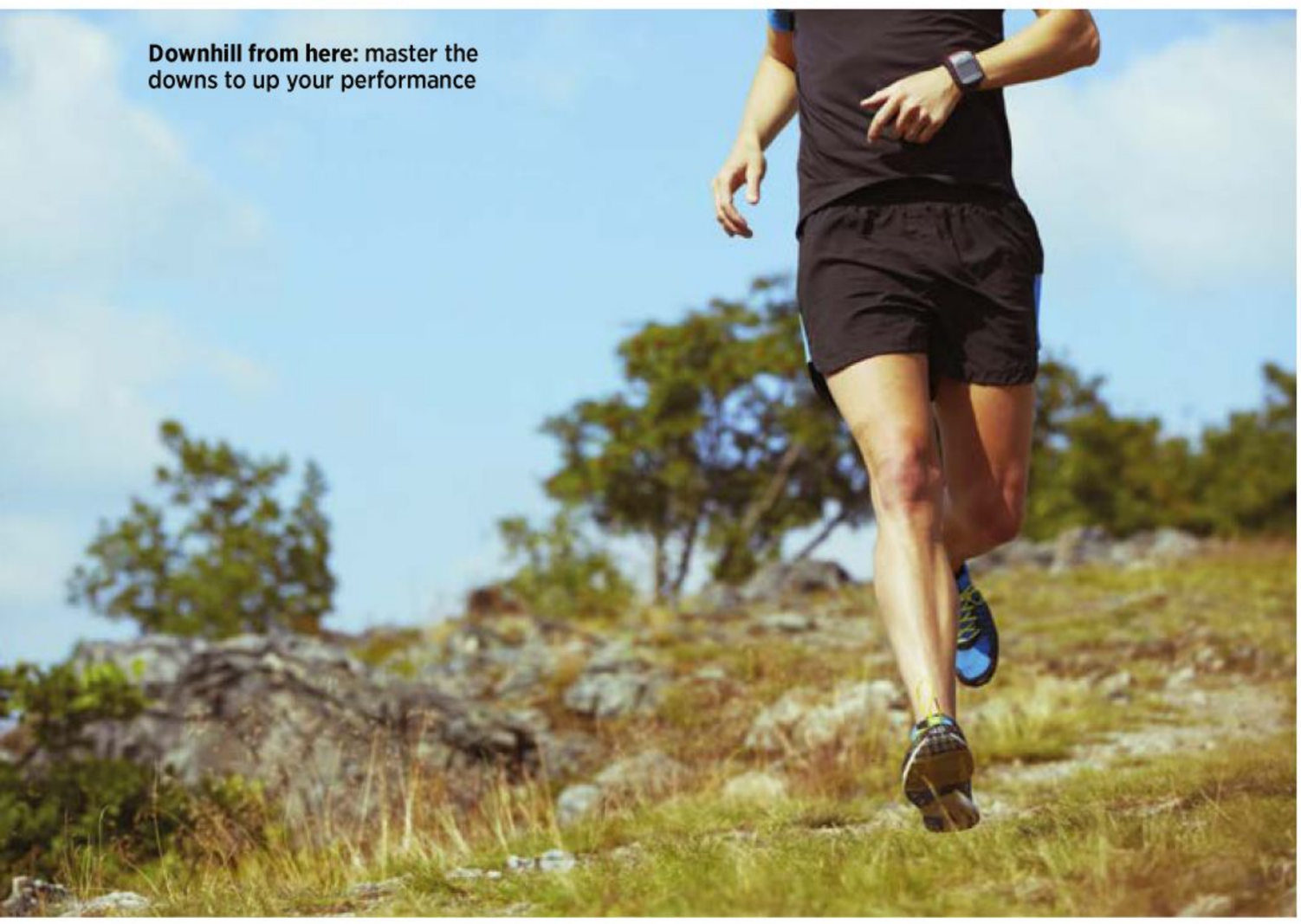
Apart from getting away to some of the bigger climbs in the UK (Snowdonia or the Cairngorms, for instance) or a short trip to Geneva and the French Alps (a lot easier then you think), there are ways of getting prepared for those descents in your own backyard.

Always be on the lookout for good trails to practice on. And if you find yourself on something a little technical, push yourself a little out of your comfort zone. Purposeful practice like this will help make micro improvements and can be done whenever you're on the trail.

'Kenyan hill sessions', where you work as hard on the down as you do on the up for set efforts, such as 3 x 10 minutes, are another great way to prepare the legs for longer descents on race day.

Lastly, get talking to a strength and conditioning coach as even a couple of sessions a week on easy run days can make a big difference if you keep at it.

They say races are won on the uphill, but lost on the downhill. Don't do all the hard work to get to the top of that hill, only to forget the race is only half done.



Downhill from here: master the downs to up your performance

"IT'S THE DESCENTS THAT ARE THE REAL KILLERS"

RACE THIS

Autumn 100

The Centurion Running Autumn 100 is the fourth in the UK Grand Slam of 100-milers that Centurion Running organises. Set on the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails, it follows well-established routes on four 25-mile legs, which means it is easy to break down mentally and physically. The Centurion volunteers will ensure that each checkpoint is well stocked with food and smiling faces . I might even see you there – I'll be the one handing out/eating the cake.

centurionrunning.com

Mound for glory: a runner makes light of the undulating course

© Stuart March Photography

Photography thinkstockphotos.co.uk

HIT THE TRAILS RUNNING WITH OUR SNEAK PEAK OF THE BEST NEW OFF-ROAD KIT

Compressport Trail Top

While the price makes this a bit of kit reserved for serious ultrarunners, there's little doubting its performance benefits. Hugely popular with the pros, the top uses 'interactive fibre' to regulate ventilation based on the intensity of your effort – preventing sudden rise and falls in body temperature. Equally useful are the six pockets at the base of the top that are big enough for gels, keys and other small essentials.

RRP: £94.99

compressport.uk.com

OMM Mountain Raid Hood Jacket

The fact that the Raid can be zipped up to OMM's Half Sleeping Bag (£120) says a lot about a jacket that's as effectively insulated as any product on the market. Primaloft Gold lining is to thank for the snug design, and the jacket as a whole is extremely breathable and fast-drying. One for an off-road adventure.

RRP: £150

theomm.com

Bridgedale Compression Socks

Designed to improve oxygen supply to the calves – thereby reducing cramp and fatigue – Bridgedale's Active Compression socks can also be worn post-run to improve circulation. Coolmax technology wicks moisture away to regulate temperature and, although not an absolutely essential bit of kit, those with a history of calf trouble are likely to benefit from the targeted compression.

RRP: £28

bridgedale.com

KIND bars

Small enough to stuff in your pocket, these sweet and salty bars make for a welcome pre-run boost or post-run treat. Available in a range of flavours, from Peanut Butter and Dark Chocolate to Maple Glazed Pecan and Sea Salt (our favourite), each bar contains around 6g of protein and 15g carbohydrate.

RRP: £1.49

nutricentre.com

Silva Trail Runner 2x

The new and improved version of the best-selling Trail Runner packs more power and a better light output of 160 lumens. It's also USB-rechargeable and, at just 130g, its lightweight design is coupled with a grippy headband to allow for jiggle-free, top-speed trail running.

RRP: £79.99

silva.se

UP Skin Shield

Prevention is often better than cure, and the same can certainly be said of this blister-preventing gel. The waterproof, non-staining Skin Shield works by creating a thin film between skin and fabric, thus reducing friction. An impressively durable and highly effective product.

RRP: £7.99

ultimate-performance.co.uk

racebook

Bored of the same old races?

Find something different with Racebook, the new fully-interactive online race listing from Wild Bunch Media, publishers of *Men's Running* and *Women's Running*. Racebook features the best events with images, video content, location maps and as much detail as anyone interested in running a race will ever need to know – from 5K to ultramarathons.

RACEBOOKUK.CO.UK

GEAR

RUNNING TECH

A DEDICATED SPACE FOR ALL THINGS TECH

TESTED RATED

★ 9 ★
10

WITHINGS ACTIVITÉ STEEL RRP: £139.95

Health and lifestyle technology are becoming inseparable. The latest example of this is Withings' elegant Activité Steel – a fitness device that looks and acts like a watch, but delivers data like a fitness tracker.

The Steel is a demonstration of beautiful simplicity – black strap (although you can get several colour options including khaki, evergreen and raspberry), solid stainless steel body, and a two-dial display that shows you the time and how far you are along with your daily fitness goal. No buttons, no notifications, no distractions.
On the surface, it looks like a well-designed but minimal watch. Dig a little deeper, though, and you unearth all manner of functionality.

The Steel automatically detects your activity and syncs the data to the Health Mate app. It also has good sleep tracking, complete with silent alarm.

What makes the Steel even better is its compatibility. Not just the wider Withings ecosystem – the Smart Body Analyser scales, the Aura alarm system and the brand's blood pressure monitor – but its ability to merge data from apps like MyFitnessPal. This means activity data and calorie intake merge seamlessly.

withings.com

★ 6 ★
10

IFIT VUE RRP: £99

The iFit Vue is a throwback to the early days of fitness trackers. In real terms, that's about two years. But given the speed at which the technology is evolving, it could be 10. It does the basics – tracking steps, workouts and sleep. It also sends phone notifications and the one-button control makes for simple navigation. It's not the best piece of tech out there, but it's cheap and a good option for anyone looking to try an activity tracker for the first time.

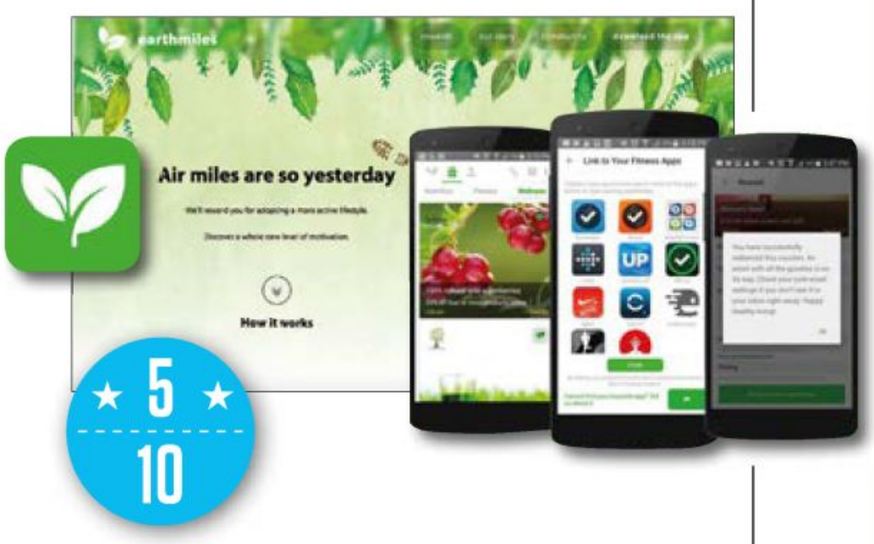
ifit.com

★ 8 ★
10

SENNHEISER OCX 686I RRP: £79.99

Sennheiser makes good headphones. Really good headphones. But does it make good sport headphones? The OCX 686i sound great. Sennheiser knows how to push out every subtlety, every nuance of a piece music through its headphones. And you can hear that quality even when in motion, even when huffing and puffing your way through a 10-mile run. So, on that front, these are a good set of buds. The only downside is the wire.

sennheiser.com



★ 5 ★
10

EARTH MILES APP RRP: FREE

Earthmiles wants to reward you for working out. The app collects data from other apps and devices, like Healthkit, Strava, Jawbone, Fitbit and many others and turns your data into earthmiles. The more miles you run and walk, the more earthmiles you earn and the more rewards you can get. Except, they're not really rewards. They're discounts for health food from the likes of Nakd, the Raw Chocolate Co and Moma. It's a neat idea, but the discounts need to be more substantial.

earthmiles.co.uk

Words David Standen

★ 8 ★
10

ASICS FUZEX PACKABLE JACKET

RRP: £65

A great option to pop on pre- and post-race, this lightweight, stylish jacket even folds up into its own pocket. The sizing is quite generous but the payoff is that it doesn't ride up your lower back as you run. At £65, it's a sizeable investment for something so lightweight and minimal. However, some useful features such as vent panels and an adjustable hood, not to mention its shimmering look, distinguish it from many of its competitors.

asics.co.uk

★ 8 ★
10

PUMA CX MOVE 2.0 SUNGLASSES

RRP: £129

Sunglasses have two benefits when it comes to marathons: they keep the sun out of your eyes and they hide your tears if you get a wee bit emotional coming down the home straight. These sunnies provide a snug, bounce-free fit. The lenses come with an anti-glare coating, while the polycarbonate frames are strong but lightweight. The head-turning colour scheme may be too jazzy for some – but when it comes to sunnies, surely it's the brighter the better.

uk.puma.com

★ 7 ★
10

ODLO YOKTO SHIRT

RRP: £45

Any self-respecting marathon top needs to be as lightweight and chafe-resistant as possible. Odlo's Yokto Shirt is both, offering an all-over warp-knit design – tiny holes dotted across the top to create air flow – for maximum breathability and coolness. It's probably not going to win a style award any time soon, but it is a high-performance bit of kit, perfect for a distance where comfort is king.

odlo.com

★ 9 ★
10

TRIBESPORTS SHORTS

RRP: £25

Tribesports is a relatively new brand, but its commitment to quality sportswear at affordable prices is refreshing. These shorts are incredibly light, offering a barely-there feel, and they also come with a useful zipped pocket – easily big enough for a gel or two. They're short enough to be unrestrictive, but long enough to preserve some dignity, and the mesh-woven inner boxer brief is as breathable as you like.

tribesports.com

★ 9 ★
10

VIBRAM FIVEFINGERS V-TOES

RRP: £8.99

They might look a little ridiculous, but Vibram Fivefingers' individual toe socks are much more than a novelty item. By preventing your toes from scrunching up, they promote effective toe-off – particularly beneficial to the mid/forefoot runner, and that sub-section of society intent on running a marathon in a pair of Vibram Fivefingers. *MR* experienced no blisters wearing these, and recommends them toe-heartedly.

primallifestyle.com

★ 8 ★
10

MONSTER ADIDAS RESPONSE

RRP: £59.95

Sport headphones have to tread a fine line between being light and barely noticeable, but powerful enough to drown out your wheezed breaths. The sound quality of Monster's Adidas Response isn't compromised at all, despite their lightweight design, and your tester is happy to report that the buds stayed firmly in ear during some high-intensity running. Wireless would, of course, be preferable, but you won't find a better value pair of headphones.

monsterproducts.com

★ 9 ★
10

SALOMON HYDRO HANDSET

RRP: £21

Carrying a traditional water bottle during a race can be something of a drag. Not so with this squeezable Salomon handset. Simple but effective, this 500ml flask with a stretch carrying system is invaluable if your energy drink of choice isn't supplied at the aid stations, or if you simply prefer to take regular on-the-run sips. Weighing in at just 120g, it's incredibly light and, best of all, the bottle compresses as you drink.

salomon.com/uk

★ 8 ★
10

TOMTOM RUNNER

RRP: £99

The original TomTom running watch lacks a heart-rate monitor, but for an accurate GPS watch that's less than £100 there's no better option. The four-button control pad couldn't be simpler to use and a wide variety of functions – distance, pace, average pace, stride length, calories burned and lap times – can all be viewed in real time. There's also a useful 'Race' feature that compares your current run to previous outings.

tomtom.com/en_gb

UPPER
The synthetic portion of the shoe that covers and fits to the foot, holding it onto the midsole.

HEEL COUNTER
Plastic or fibreboard piece in the heel that helps to keep the heel centre over the midsole. Watch out for heel tabs being too high as these can rub against the achilles.

MIDSOLE
Cushions the foot and plays a key role in controlling excess foot motion. The midsole is located between the upper and the outsole and is attached to both.

★ 7 ★
10

NEW BALANCE FRESH FOAM 1080
RRP: £115
Calling all fans of cushioning: the New Balance Fresh Foam 1080 is your kind of shoe. Bringing Fresh Foam technology to the 1080 for the first time, the philosophy here is that bigger is better. It certainly looks the part, with eye-catching colours and a plush feel. However, it's actually a firmer ride than you might expect and, at 293g, it's on the heavier side. Your tester also found the arch support caused a slight 'hot spot' while on the move. A smart looking shoe, then, but not one that quite justifies its hefty price tag.
newbalance.co.uk

★ 8 ★
10
BEST OVERALL

SAUCONY KINVARA 7
RRP: £110
The Kinvara is marathon-running royalty, with previous editions beloved of runners the world over. The latest batch keeps the 4mm heel-to-toe drop, lightweight feel (218g) and flashy looks. However, it runs a little firmer than its predecessor, which some runners may dislike. A "Pro lock" system keeps the laces tight in the middle as well as the top, and the shoe achieves the difficult feat of feeling quick and comfortable. All in all, a great option for efficient runners who are still pushin' for some cushion. Long live the Kin, indeed.
saucony.co.uk

★ 8 ★
10
BEST ON A BUDGET

PUMA SPEED 600
RRP: £90
The Speed 600 comes tagged with the capped-up jargon you'd expect from a new trainer – IGNITE Foam in the midsole, an EverFit + upper to secure your foot and a molded OrthoLite sockliner for optimum fit – but what really matters is how it feels to run in. And, happily, there's no complaints from us. The mesh upper is supremely breathable and the shoe as a whole feels pleasantly lightweight. The effectiveness of the 'engineered propulsion zone' built into the toe end of the outsole is questionable, but this is a very decent neutral shoe.
uk.puma.com

Testers Isaac Williams / Rick Pearson / Paul Clayton

UNDER ARMOUR SPEEDFORM GEMINI 2

RRP: £130

Described as 'the smartest shoe ever made', the Gemini 2 is certainly cutting edge – with in-built Record-equipped technology allowing you to sync your running data to the partnered mobile app. Time, cadence, duration, distance and splits are all recorded in a shoe like no other. It is slightly bulky as a result – the 295g weight will be too much for those of a more minimal bent – but for slower, longer distance stuff there's no faulting the comfort or, indeed, the genuinely innovative tech.

underarmour.co.uk

★ 8 ★
10

NEW RELEASES

If you're running a marathon this spring, now is not – we repeat, is NOT – the time to buy a new pair of shoes! However, few things get a runner's pulse racing quite like a fresh pair of sneaks, so hopefully you'll find something in the collection that takes your fancy – and can act as a well-deserved reward for your valiant efforts.

TOE BOX
The forward tip of the upper of a shoe that provides space and protection for the toes.

OUTSOLE
The outer sole of a shoe. The outsole should provide traction and resistance to wear.

★ 8 ★
10

★ 6 ★
10

★ 7 ★
10

ADIDAS ADIZERO ADIOS BOOST 3

RRP: £110

Lightweight, flexible and snazzy, this shoe will score highly with the speed snakes among you. Like a Formula One car, everything unnecessary has been stripped away in a bid to reduce weight and boost speed. This translates to a perforated upper and a responsive Boost midsole. A slightly roomier toebox would be a welcome addition, while the 9mm heel-to-toe drop will displease members of the minimalist mafia. However, there's a reason this shoe is the weapon of choice among many top runners: it's a fast, fuss-free delight.

adidas.co.uk

KALENJI LD

RRP: £59.99

If you're the kind of runner who favours support and stability over speed and performance, the Kalenji LD could be the shoe for you. Comfortable, with an excellent lacing system, it's also something of a bargain at £59.99. The majority of runners, however, are likely to find its weightiness, built-up design and stiff midsole an issue. Ultimately, it's a shoe best suited to the heavy heel-striker planning on tackling the marathon distance. Everyone else is probably going to be better off looking elsewhere.

kalenji.co.uk

ASICS FUZE X

RRP: £100

If a Hoka and a racing flat had a lovechild, it might look like the Asics Fuze X. Boasting premium cushioning in a lightweight package, this shoe's biggest plus-point is its versatility. Suitable for the gym, road and hard-packed trails, it's a great option for those looking for one shoe for all their fitness needs. Equally, though, in the Fuze X's eagerness to be all things to all men, it ends up falling slightly short: too heavy to be an outright racer; too lightweight for the maximalist brigade. But if it's a Jack of all trades you're after, look no further.

asics.co.uk

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MAY

RACE BOOK

INSIDE

90 ARCTIC ICE ULTRA 96 TOUGHEST OBSTACLE RACE

© Mikkel Beisner

ARCTIC JUNKIES

The Ice Ultra is a 230K ultramarathon in sub-zero conditions. **Robbie Britton** packed his snowshoes and headed to Sweden to take part

"If you die in the Arctic, you're either stupid or lazy." That was the advice that echoed in my ears as we stepped onto the runway in Gällivare, Sweden, the temperature a balmy -13˚C.

The Beyond the Ultimate Ice Ultra is a 230K multistage ultramarathon that runs through the frozen wilderness of Swedish Lapland in early February, and this wee Londoner wanted to find out just how tough he was)or if this particular brand of stupidity would be his undoing).

Moved a week earlier than the 2014 edition because race director Kris King wanted to make sure it was "cold enough", there was much debate among the competitors about how to pack and dress for such cold conditions. Training for the race is equally puzzling. Practising à la Rocky Balboa in a frozen meat locker is not an option for most of us, so getting out in the middle of the night in winter was most people's training tactic.

With an element of self-support throughout the race, competitors had to carry all their food on their own backs, making it a fine balance between saving weight and avoiding starvation. This is an even more difficult conundrum in cold conditions as the body has to burn so many more calories just to keep warm. Questions abounded: just how many jelly meerkats could I fit in a 20l UD backpack? Is it possible to hunt a reindeer with your bare hands?

Each stage had it's own characteristics. There were climbs and high, open plateaus; miles of frozen lakes and winding woodland trails. The local wildlife of reindeer, eagles, foxes and moose added to the sense of adventure. Thankfully the brown bears are asleep in February, and no amount of snowshoes slapping on the trail will wake them up.

Despite the obvious dangers of pushing yourself to the limit in such an unforgiving climate, the support teams – a mix of local Sami herdsmen and the Exile Medics from the UK – made everyone feel safe throughout. »

Photography Mikkel Beisner

Main: The Abominable Snowman makes a rare public appearance
Insert: thick snow is not a runner's best friend

ICE ULTRA IN NUMBERS

No. of runners: 12
Distance: 230K

Winner: Robbie Britton
17hrs 12mins 55secs

Weather:

Terrain:

Cost: £2,000
Verdict: ★★★★★★★★★★

beyondtheultimate.co.uk

Snow patrol: a runner trudges through a wooded section of course

Great Britton: Robbie takes the sub-zero conditions in his stride

Looks in tents: the teepees provided a cosy night's sleep

Marching on: a competitor crests a snow-covered hill

Whiteout: running wasn't always an option

Strangely, it was the heat rather than the cold that presented the greatest danger. The temperature at the start, a tropical -6˚C, was unseasonably warm for this time of year. When it drops below -10˚C, the trails freeze and the lakes are solid. On the other hand, the comparatively mild temperatures we started in made the trails powdery. Each step sunk into the snow and soon the cumbersome snowshoes became a necessity.

FOOTWEAR FAILS

Having practised for a total of 20 minutes in snowshoes before arriving in Sweden, it was quickly apparent that this would be the steepest of learning curves. At the start, there was deep hatred for these plastic tennis racket-like creations; by the end, it was a mixture of love and scorn, because they're hard work but you'd be in dire straits without them.

Staying overnight in a mixture of Nordisk Teepees with reindeer skins and sleeping bags, as well as Shackleton-esque wooden cabins warmed and lit by wood-burning stoves and gas lanterns, gave the race an extra sense of adventure and community. All of us had our own challenges to face, but there was a great sense of togetherness that would see all but two of the runners to the finish line – as much a victory for the support team as for the participants.

Austin Jarrett, swashbuckling industrialist from Stafford, speaking through a frozen beard that filled us all with envy, said: "In my experience, the margin for error in the Arctic is much smaller than it is in the desert and jungle. It was about more than your ability to run, as personal admin and awareness became paramount in the freezing wilderness." Jarrett surged to a strong second place after an awesome battle with Shaun Marsden, a service delivery manager from Surrey. Your correspondent was happy to take home the top honours.

The final two days saw temperatures drop below -10˚C and the surface water on the lakes, previously akin to wading through wet cement, freeze solid and allow runners to move quickly across the top. Colder really was better. Crossing the finish line in JokkMokk was a great experience for everyone, colourful Sami flags flying and the promise of an all-you-can-eat buffet in the evening enticing a fast finish from all. Five days of rationing is a great way to build up an appetite.

So if sub-zero temperatures, waist-deep snow, miles of wilderness, physical and mental toil, and seeing one of the most beautiful regions in the world sounds appealing, the Ice Ultra could be the 2017 race for you. If you're lazy, stupid or don't like the cold, maybe try the desert instead. MR

TACKLE THE ICE

THREE THINGS THAT WILL HELP YOU COMPLETE THE ICE ULTRA

1. Practice in your snowshoes
Sometimes, it just isn't efficient to run in trainers. Running in snowshoes can be painful, especially if your legs and feet aren't used to the action, so put in plenty of practice beforehand.

2. Take your nutrition seriously
Nutritionist Renee McGregor looked over my food plan and we got a great balance. Put snacks in the freezer just to see what they taste like frozen and count every gram as it'll be on your back. Finally, pack an extra emergency ration, just for when you or someone else really needs it.

3. Carry the correct kit
Get the best kit you can, with plenty of layers to put on or take off depending on the cold. Patagonia was my brand of choice and the windproof trousers were all I wore throughout. Get some fancy mittens, too – cold hands can be excruciatingly painful.

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THE SCIENCE BEHIND UCII AND BOSWELLIA

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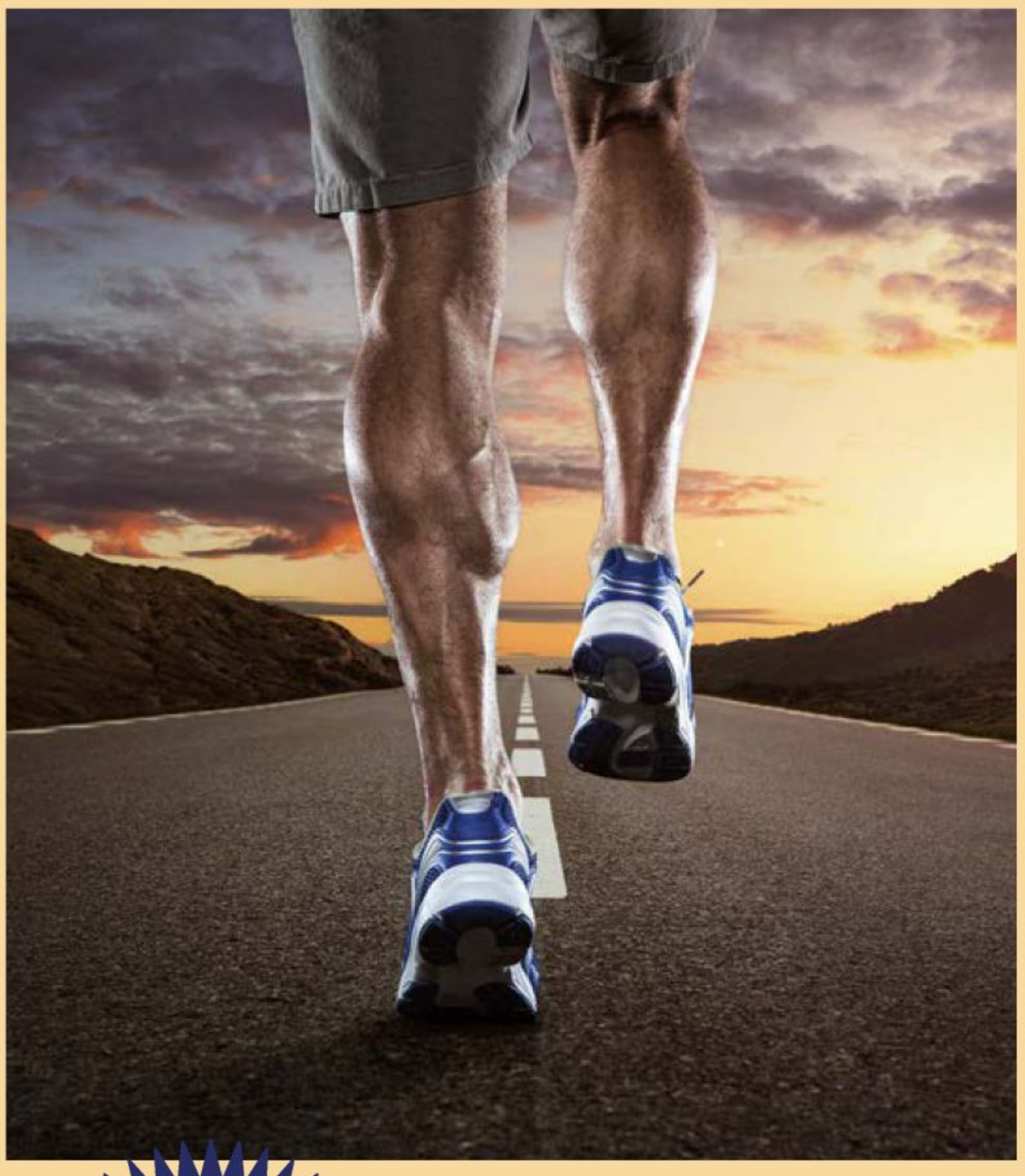
* The vitamin C in this product helps collagen formation for the normal function of cartilage and bones. It also helps to protect cells from oxidative damage (stress)
** D. C. Crowley et al. Safety and efficacy of undenatured type II collagen in the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee: a clinical trial. *Int. J. Med. Sci. 2009*, 6
*** J.P. Lugo et al. Undenatured type II collagen (UC-II®) for joint support: a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled study in healthy volunteers. *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition 2013*, 10:48
**** A. Vishal et. al. A Double Blind, Randomised, Placebo Controlled Clinical Study Evaluates the Early Efficacy of Aflapin® in Subjects with Osteoarthritis of Knee. *Int. J. Med. Sci. 2011*, 8



support longer periods of exercise before experiencing joint discomfort.*** A 2011 clinical study showed a compound of Boswellia (Aflapin) effectively supports joint function.****

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Try it for yourself. Find your nearest Solgar® stockist at **solgar.co.uk**

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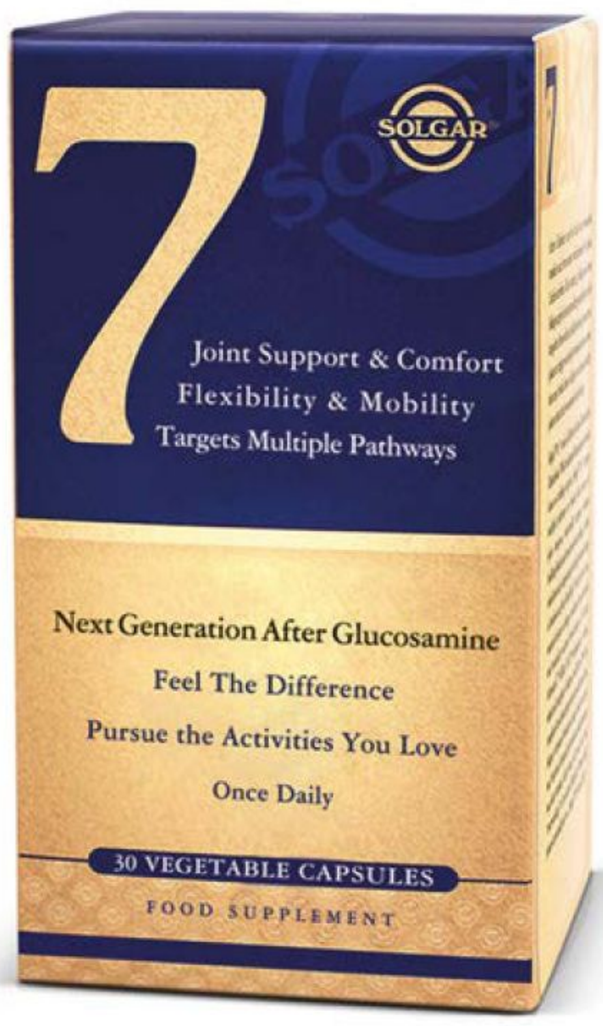
If you would like to take the Solgar® 7 Feel The Difference Challenge, then email mensrunning@wildbunchmedia.co.uk and tell us why you think Solgar® 7 could help you run better.



Terms & Conditions: Competition closes 27th April 2016. Open to UK residents only. Open to over 18s only.

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WHAT IS IT?

The world's greatest, most gratuitous obstacle race. Originating in Scandinavia, Toughest quickly gained a reputation for its slick organisation and unique obstacles. In a world where bigger is better, Toughest is the biggest and baddest of the lot.

WHY SHOULD I DO IT?

Where else can you experience the 'Super Slide', a five-storey waterslide that propels you into the air before you fall into the icy waters below? Toughest is, quite simply, unique.

HOW TOUGH IS IT?

Well, the clue is in the title. This is one helluva challenge that will test not only your stamina but also your pain threshold and upper-body strength. Approach with caution.

WHERE IS IT?

In 'Pippingford Park, London', apparently. Although a quick google will reveal that Pippingford Park is, in fact, in East Sussex, 30 minutes south of London.

WHEN IS IT?

Saturday 23 April, 2016.

"IN A WORLD WHERE BIGGER IS BETTER, TOUGHEST IS THE BIGGEST OF THE LOT"

HOW DO I ENTER?

Summon up the courage and head to the Toughest website (toughest.se/en). A place in the race will set you back £95, but it'll be worth it for the bragging rights alone.
toughest.se/en

Words Rick Pearson
Photography Jesper Grønnemark / Jacques Holst

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MAN DOWN!

MR *columnist* Jim Old *finds to his dismay that his kids care little for his PBs*

Our times are pretty important to us runners. We can obsess about shaving seconds from a PB or completing a sub-something marathon.

Children tend not to care so much about this sort of thing. My kids, for example, only recognise podium places. They don't understand that without a substantial programme of doping and course-cutting, their father isn't likely to be seeing one of those any time soon. So when they watch me race I'm always ready for undisguised disappointment and unvarnished opinions. In a recent 10K, I had the benefit of these before I even reached the finish line. Because by the time they saw me, I was dying.

The race ended in our local park. The course entered at one corner and took us runners diagonally across the grass, straight towards the finish. That's OK, I thought, nearly there. Then, 50 yards from the giant inflatable arch, we turned sharply and began running away from it, towards the far end of the park. Half a mile still to run then and things were properly falling apart. Forty minutes earlier I'd tossed my race plan over my shoulder in an exuberant gallop from the start. Now my energy levels were in freefall and my pace was dropping.

CHILD'S PLAY

At this point, my family clocked me. "Go on kids, run with Daddy!" I heard my wife Sarah shout. Almost instantly my eight-year-old was there, on the other side of the tape, matching my speed easily. "I'm jogging, Daddy," he called cheerfully, performing an exaggerated slow-motion lope to illustrate his point. I glanced at his little grinning face and my thoughts turned fleetingly to murder. Then, to hell with this! I drilled into a hidden energy reserve normally dedicated to maintaining essential organ function. Suddenly I had what I needed to pull away from my opinionated progeny and his short but fresh legs. He upped his speed to match my kick but moments later, with a final volley of stinging playground sarcasm, he fell away.

"WHEN MY KIDS WATCH ME RACE, I'M ALWAYS READY FOR UNDISGUISED DISAPPOINTMENT AND UNVARNISHED OPINIONS"

A couple more turns and the finish was before me again. My stolen source of last ditch energy was running low but, gasping and stumbling, I managed to hold my pace and cross the line.

Passing through the arch, however, I entered a Tolkienesque shadow world where I wafted like a wraith among the living. Dark shapes moved around me. There was nothing but silence.

A while later, Sarah found me wandering in confused circles and guided me to a nearby bench. She asked how I'd done. Coming slowly back to the world, I remembered my watch. I blinked doubtfully at the screen. Sarah called the kids over. "Daddy's got a new best time," she told them.

Yeah. Whatevs. MR

Photography thinkstockphotos.co.uk

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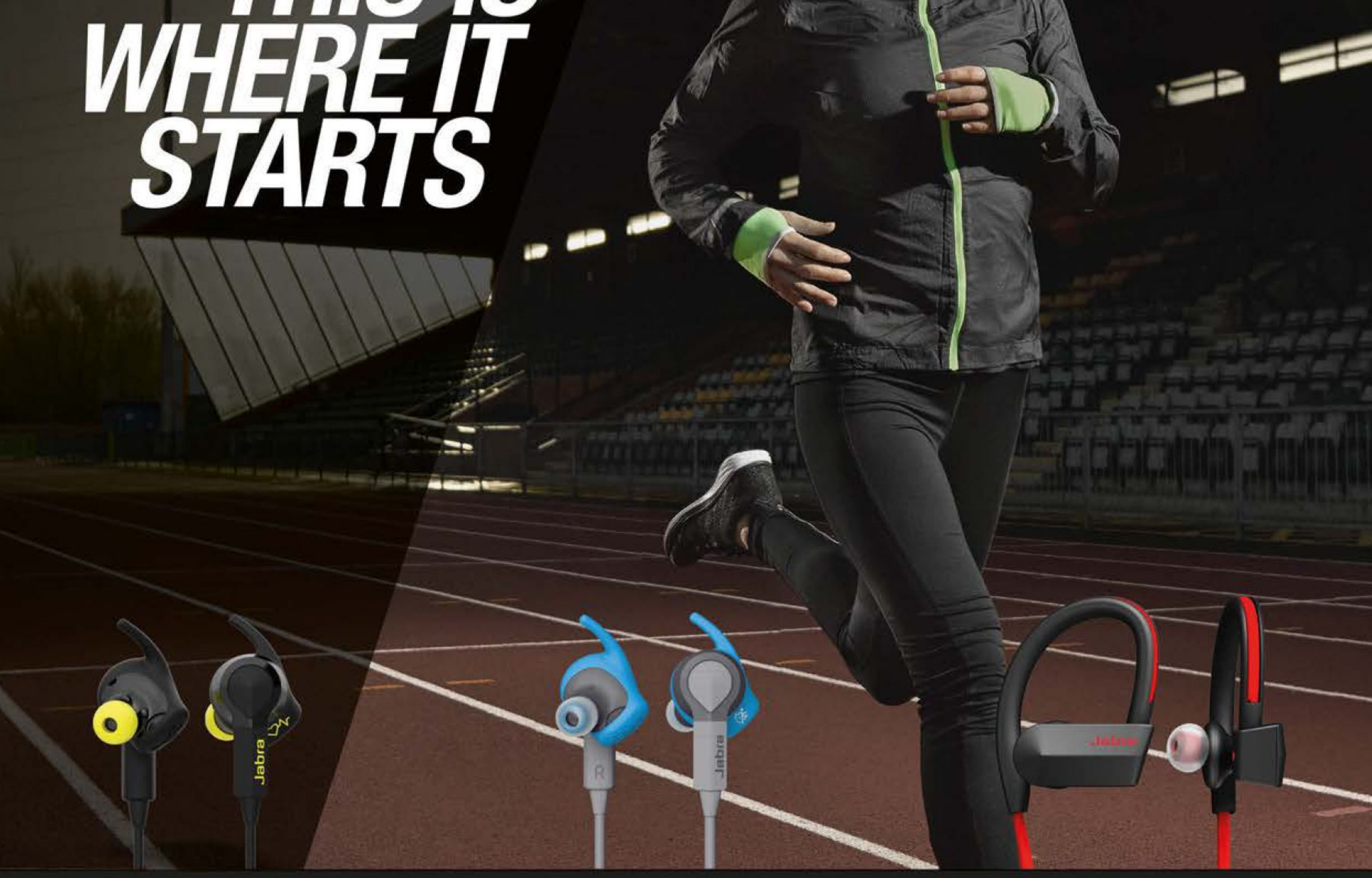

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