

Banishing the Performance Blues

We all run for different reasons. Some do it purely for fun, but many of us also enjoy pushing ourselves, improving our performance and/or getting a PB. When we first start running improvement comes quickly and relatively easily as we begin to garner basic fitness, but once we've been running for a year or two it becomes steadily more difficult to improve our times.

In this 2-part guide we look at some ideas for getting the most out of our performance and moving on from the performance plateau that afflicts more seasoned runners. We start in this issue by looking at focussing our training/racing and then next time we will go on to consider improving performance on race day itself.

Race Selection

Many runners enjoy the buzz of racing – turning up on a Sunday morning, the banter beforehand, the thrill of the race, crossing the finishing line and the swapping of stories afterwards. As a result many of us race nearly every week, sometimes more than once a week. Whilst this is fine (and the last thing I want to do is discourage people from proudly donning their red vest), if we also want to improve it is important that we do this within the framework of an overall plan.

What I mean by this is that every 3 months or so we should select a race that is going to be our **TARGET RACE**. Our **TARGET RACE** then becomes our focus, and we build a training plan and race schedule around it.

So, for instance, if you were to decide you want to improve your half-marathon time – the first thing would be to find a suitable (ie preferably flat/fast) half marathon, ideally about 3-4 months away. There are a number of resources that can be used for this – the TRR web-site, the Runners' World web-site, Essexroadrunning.org.uk, plain old-fashioned Googling and, most useful of all, Gary Perryman (sorry Gary – but there is no-one better at sniffing out PB potential races!).

Training

Now you have selected your **TARGET RACE**, most of your training then becomes focused on peaking your half-marathon performance for it and, likewise, most races you run become subsidiary to it.

For a distance like half-marathon, training should be a combination of longer, stamina building runs – peaking at slightly over race distance 3-4 weeks before the race - and speed work, but with a focus on relatively long intervals (ie 800-1200 metres is probably ideal). For shorter distance races speed work (over shorter intervals) becomes more important and vice-versa for longer distances, where stamina training should play a bigger part. Ideally, you should look to train at least 3 days a week and, if your race is off-road, at least some of this should also be off-road.

It is more than fine to build in races to the schedule as long as, for the most part, they fit with the overall plan. So for instance, if you're preparing for a marathon you don't want to be doing Parkruns and 10Ks most weeks, and vice versa (ie focus on shorter distance races if your **TARGET RACE** is a 5 or 10K). Finally allow some flexibility - it is no problem taking odd day out of the plan to do a favourite race, a 53-12 Cross-Country or even to fit in a visit to Auntie Ethel!

It is also important then to take it a bit easier in the 7-10 days before your race. Ideally do not run a hard race the weekend before and take 2-3 days off completely immediately before the big day. If you need more help constructing a training plan then please ask me or any of the TRR coaches.

In the next issue we talk about the day of the race itself and some of the things you can do to make sure all that training pays off.