



## **TRAINING for the MARATHON: © Steve Manning**

### *Part 2 'Creating your Training Program'*

Many runners follow blindly any program on marathon training they can find. Because of the unique characteristics of each individual it is difficult for any program to work for every runner. What you must do is create a training program that suits you.

The first step in creating your own program should be learning about basic training principles and programming. You then need to consider your own abilities and experience. After that the sample programs at the end of this article can be modified to create the perfect program to suit you.

Training has less impact on race performances the further away it is from your goal race. This means that the training you do six months before the race will really only help you be in good shape to train hard when you must in the period just before the race.

The final three weeks before a marathon is also not the time to put in hard training because you should be tapering and peaking for the race. You can not effectively get fitter in these last few weeks but you can become more prepared to race well.

This leaves the two macrocycles (seven to eight weeks) before the final taper as the most important training period. Your longest long runs and speed sessions should be at this time. The final ten weeks is the culmination of all of the training you have done previously.

If you had been injured, come off a layoff and were only able to train in the final ten weeks the end result might not be much different. But if training is interrupted over this period then you should look at changing your goals because you may not have the base required to get you through a marathon successfully.

### **LONG TERM PLANNING**

Long Term Planning involves looking at the program as a whole. What will be the focus of each week? What lead up races are needed? How many long runs are planned? How will progression be built into the program?

### **TRAINING PHASES**

Each year you will have long phases of Base, Preparation, Competition and Transition. Training will be adjusted in each of these phases to reflect proximity to important races and recovery required. These phases are important so that you can have continued improvement over the long term.

### **MACROCYCLES**

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Macrocycles involve a repeating series of strong weeks and recovery weeks. They keep you focused on what you need to achieve in each week and break up your long term program into physical and mental blocks of training.

You will not improve if you train the same way every week. It takes around four to six weeks for your body to completely adapt to a particular training load. Continuing the training after this time will give limited performance improvements and may even set you up for overtraining. You must plan the focus of each week so that you can recover from the hard training.

You do not get fitter when you train hard, you only break your body down. Improved fitness only occurs when you recover from training and adapt to that stress. If recovery time is not part of your training program you will not be able to absorb the training and get any benefit from it.

Macrocycles are designed to give you planned recovery within this six week period. The macrocycles in our sample program are over four weeks and repeat three strong weeks followed by a recovery week.

Within each macrocycle the strong weeks are fairly similar to give you time to adapt. Progression generally occurs from one macrocycle to the next. The recovery weeks involve significantly reduced mileage but increased intensity including a race.

The sample mileage chart is drawn from the 3 hour training program. An increasing wave pattern is apparent reflecting the macrocycles. The final macrocycle is of only three weeks duration and involves tapering and sharpening sessions. Any mileage in this last three weeks is more likely to detract from your marathon than help you. You can not really get any fitter in such a short time but you can become more prepared to race by cutting back on mileage and frequency, and increasing intensity. *(An article in the next magazine will cover the final three weeks and peaking training)*

## **PROGRESSION**

Your body will not adapt and grow stronger unless it is subjected to a level of stress greater than it is used to. This principle of 'overload' is fundamental to all training theory. What it means in practice is planning increasing amounts of training mileage or intensity to get the desired performance improvement.

Improvement is not linear. We are biological organisms and not machines. Increased training loads should not be tried until you can cope with your current training load. These increases in training should be within a planned structure of progression and take into account mileage, frequency, intensity and adequate recovery.

As you progress through the preparation phase of your training program long runs will get longer and total mileage will increase. The total distance of speed sessions will also increase, as may their frequency. You should be careful about trying to increase quantity and intensity at the same time.

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## **Types of Sessions**

There are only a few different types of sessions that need to be incorporated into your schedule. Each is important in different ways to developing greater fitness and faster times.

### **Long runs**

Long runs are the foundation of any marathon training program. They primarily help by increasing the glycogen storing capacity of the liver so that you will not run out of energy in the marathon. They are also important in developing confidence in your ability to go the distance.

Physiologically long runs improve the functioning of mitochondria within muscle cells. Once depletion is reached, long runs make all your muscle fibres work - not just the ones that are used for endurance running.

Two runs of twenty kilometres are not as effective as one run of thirty kilometres. It is important that near complete depletion occurs within a single session. This does not mean that you should run 42 kilometres in training to get the best training effect. Doing near marathon runs increases the risk of injury and overtraining with little added benefit.

Long runs are the single most common cause of injury. For most runners it is better to look at doing fortnightly long runs rather than weekly ones. This means you can also enjoy your running a bit more with more frequent racing.

Long runs should be at a pace that is at least 30 seconds slower than race pace. To get the best training effect run very easy for the first five kilometres and try to finish off each long run at a slightly faster pace.

### **Tempo Sessions and Races**

If you are aiming for a particular time in a marathon then tempo sessions and races are necessary. They most closely simulate the conditions you will encounter in the race itself.

Tempo sessions, time trials and threshold sessions all aim to get you running for extended periods at marathon race pace or slightly faster. They are run at a controlled effort and pace and should always be slower than what you would be able to do if you were racing that distance.

Races are near 100% efforts over shorter distances. They have the added advantage of the stress of competition. You learn how to run with others, not start too fast, drink while running, and get the best out of yourself as you kick it in to the finish.

### **Speed Sessions**



The best way to control your race readiness is through speed sessions. During the peaking and sharpening phase they let your body know that a supreme effort will be required soon.

Speed sessions can be the most satisfying type of training you do. There is nothing better than running fast and in control over a long session to give you confidence in your ability.

Speed sessions teach you pace judgement by pushing you in a noncompetitive low-risk situation. You can learn from your mistakes and truly find out where your limits are.

There are a huge variety of speed sessions that are possible. The way you run the session determines the effect you will achieve. The length and number of repetitions, your recovery between reps and how fast you run, all contribute to the type of benefit of the session.

The easiest way to describe sessions is on which type of energy system they are focused on improving.

**Threshold sessions** are run at a pace that if you went slightly faster it would have a major affect on how long you could keep going. They are generally considered to be around 10km race pace. The 'threshold' is the lactate threshold where you can no longer dissipate the lactate produced and this accumulation of lactate slows you down.

**Max VO2 sessions** are at a pace that if you went any faster you would not be able to consume any more oxygen. These are generally at 3km to 5km race pace. Max VO2 used to be considered to be the major determinant of running success. Most speed sessions will be run at this pace or slightly slower.

Aerobic Power and Lactate sessions have little relevance for marathoners. They are at too fast a pace and a shorter duration to be truly effective.

While it is important to train all variables at some time, shorter races need a different mix to marathons.

Speed sessions are important for runners of all ability levels. They improve running form, develop pace judgement and the variety prevents boredom. It is a mistake to focus just on mileage and avoid speedwork. If you do not run faster than race pace in training you will find it very difficult to run to your potential in the marathon.

Speedwork also increases the production of human growth hormone while mileage suppresses it. This means that you will recover better from training and be able to train more if you include speedwork.

## **Strength sessions**



Running hills is the best way to increase strength. This can be as repetitions in a speed session or passively on recovery and long runs. While weight training is good for developing general strength there is no evidence that this is translated into the type of strength required for marathon running.

One of the major benefits of greater strength is lower injury risk. The problem is that strength sessions themselves carry a greater injury risk. Plyometrics like hill bounding is the quickest way to get performance gains but also carries the highest level of risk.

One major factor that should be considered is the course that you wish to run. If you have a hilly race planned then you must train on hills. If you can simulate the type of hills it will be even more effective. There are a number of short sharp hills at the end of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Marathon. It is a good idea to prepare for this by running strongly over similar types of hills at the end of your long runs.

### **Recovery Sessions**

Recovery sessions are a very important part of your program. They help clean out and rebuild the structure of your muscles after hard training. They should not require any recovery themselves but should be at a very low intensity and quantity. You should be running faster in your long runs than you do in your recovery sessions.

### **Creating a Daily Schedule**

Now that you understand some of the theory of training you can begin to get down and create your training program.

Frequency, intensity, quantity and recovery must be balanced within a weekly microcycle. These weekly cycles require progression that conforms to the design of your overall long-term program.

Look at what kind of training you have done before and decide on a realistic increase. This may include the number of sessions as well their distance.

Look at your lifestyle and find out the level of commitment you can give to training. Decide which days of the week will have which types of sessions.

Decide on some leadup races and structure your macrocycles around them. Fill out the content of each session incorporating some progression.

Finally remember that you have created a training plan. It must be flexible and respond to how you are coping with the training. Trying to keep going on a program that is clearly beyond your capabilities will just lead to breakdown not a PB.

### **RUN WITH A GROUP**



You may need some extra help and advice along the way. The best way to get this is join a club or train with a group.

Marathon training requires a high level of dedication and consistency. Training with a partner or group will keep you committed to the mutual cause when the miles start to take their toll. Being part of a training group will also help you in the race itself. Runner's World are starting their pacing groups in Australia with the Sydney Celebrating Sport 2000 marathon as one of the targeted events. In a marathon it is survival rather than competition that is important. Members of the group will be there to help each other through to the final few kilometres when it is everyone for themselves.

There aren't many more satisfying accomplishments than finishing a marathon. Perhaps it is the completely depleted state that you finish in, but you know you have really conquered something difficult when you cross that finish line. Make sure that you are ready to take on the challenge then make a commitment and stick with it. Good luck with your training and hopefully I will see you at the finish of the Celebrating Sport 2000 Marathon on April 30th.

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