

The 12 Week Minimalist MARATHON Program:

By Steve Manning

Marathon. The name itself conjures up images of extreme feats of endurance, beyond the capabilities of the normal sane individual. You see images of runners pushing themselves through the pain barrier. They hit the wall and are left to stagger and crawl towards the finish, if the gutter doesn't get them first. Those who do make it to the finish are the supremely talented blessed by the best of God's genetic heritage.

While highly inaccurate this perspective of the marathon is shared by the general public. Some of this seeps into the psyche of the running community and the result is a decline in participation rates of marathons in Australia. The reality is that while the marathon is a great challenge it is easily within the reach of most runners.

Unlike Australia, marathons overseas are currently experiencing a boom. One of the major differences between the statistics in the United States and Australia is the average pace for marathoners. In Australia the average time is well under four hours. In the US it is closer to four and a half hours.

In Australia runners think they have to train for months and months covering as much mileage as they can. Our role models are elite marathoners Deek, Monners and Lisa Ondieki. In the US the main role model is an overweight Ophra Winprey running a marathon in five hours.

Having a five hour marathoner as the most recognised runner in the country does not necessarily diminish the challenge of the marathon. What it does do is make the social runner think it is OK to run that slow. It also makes them think that the marathon is something that even they can accomplish.

When I ask runners why they do not run marathons the most common complaint is that they take too much training. To run a fast marathon certainly requires a much larger commitment of time and energy than a fun run. In fact to run close to your potential in a marathon, no matter what the speed, means good planning, no injuries, and a dedication to a long term goal.

But perhaps we are aiming a bit too high. To finish a marathon at any speed is a great achievement. Not everyone can qualify for the Olympics but most runners can show the courage and stamina to push themselves into realms that they are not used to.

Without doubt, the single most important factor in finishing a marathon is not long runs, mileage, experience or speed. It is mental strength.

If finishing is the goal, rather than seeing how fast we can run, then perhaps the marathon would be accessible to more people. If we recognised what it

really takes to finish a marathon then more runners might think they could do it too.

This four part marathon training program is dedicated to those thousands of recreational runners who look on with awe at marathons. They think how great it would be to run a marathon, if they only had the time, the ability, or the training.

This is not a training program about how to run a faster marathon. It is about how little training is needed to just finish.

While mental strength is the key to finishing a marathon, training is what gives you the confidence to succeed. This program will focus on the sessions that are most important to building that confidence.

Many people train too much. There is nothing better than finishing stronger than your running friend who trained twice as hard. They were overtrained, and you were fresh from training smart rather than long.

The first thing to do after picking your event is to decide how many weeks of marathon training is needed. If you have been running regularly two to three times a week then that is enough to start this program. From there you need twelve weeks or 3 months to prepare.

We are looking at an autumn marathon so you have to start after the Christmas and new years cheer. The twelve weeks are divided into three phases. Four weeks of base and buildup, five weeks of specific preparation and three weeks of the competition phase. After the marathon another three weeks of recovery training completes the program. Each of these phases will have an article explaining how to train and what to expect.

There is a program for an experienced marathoner just looking to participate and also a program for the first time marathoner. These programs are not about how fast you want to run. Instead they are about the amount of experience you have had and what you can cope with without getting injured.

Both programs have a few training sessions that are the focus of each weeks training throughout each phase. Progression is built into the twelve weeks by changing these sessions.

There are three main days of training. Long Runs and races are on Sundays, speedwork is on Tuesdays and race pace training is on Thursdays. These are the only important sessions that must be done but other recovery sessions can be added.

SAMPLE TRAINING PROGRAM experienced marathoner

<u>Week</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>Tues</u>	<u>Thurs</u>	<u>Sunday</u>
12	BUILDUP	5 x 2km@10k, 3 min rec	Easy 15km	Long Run 25km
11	BUILDUP	6 x 1km@5k, 3 min rec	Easy 20km	Long Run 30km
10	STRONG	12 x 500M @3k, 500 rec	Easy 20km	Long Run 30km
9	RECOVERY	500/1/2/1/500, neg split	Steady 10km	Race 10km

SAMPLE TRAINING PROGRAM first time marathoner

Week	TYPE	Tues	Thurs	Sat	Sunday
12	BUILDUP	4 x 2km@10k, 3 min rec	Easy 10km	Long Run	25km
11	BUILDUP	5 x 1km@5k, 3 min rec	Easy 12km	Race 15km	
10	STRONG	8 x 500M @3k, 500 rec	Easy 15km	Long Run	30km
9	RECOVERY	500/1/1/500, neg split	Steady 10km	Race 10km	

LONG RUNS

Most people think that high weekly mileage is what is important for marathon training. Long runs are much more vital than overall mileage. The goal of long runs is to deplete glycogen reserves so the muscle and liver will adapt and learn to store more glycogen. Unless you run beyond the storage capabilities of your body you will not adapt. This has to happen in one run like it will in the marathon itself. Long runs are also an important training session to give you the confidence that you can finish.

FREQUENT RACING

The best way to simulate race conditions is to run in a race. Besides the training effect of running hard for an extended distance you will also benefit from learning to run with others, drinking while running, using pace judgement and learning to persevere when it gets tough in the last few kilometres. Races keep you motivated by having short term goals to aim for and by letting you know how your fitness is progressing.

SPEEDWORK

Speedwork is not sprinting. It is not running as fast as you can during an interval session. Marathon speedwork is about running at race pace, threshold pace and Max VO2 pace for smaller segments than you actually race. You should finish the speed session feeling like you could have run faster or run more repetitions if you had to. Speedwork prevents injury by increasing human growth hormone production, improving flexibility and range of motion, and increasing strength. Another goal of speedwork is to develop pace judgement for racing.

RACE PACE TRAINING

This is the most underrated type of training there is. The goal of training is to arrive on race day with the skills and ability to cope with what is required. Doing some of your training at the pace you want to run means that you will know what it feels like to run at that pace and you will be comfortable doing it. It should be of an extended duration but short enough that you will have no trouble maintaining the pace.

Part 1 Base Buildup Training

The goal of the four week base training phase is to establish a routine of training before the hard work needs to be done. The first two weeks are buildup weeks leading to the strong third week. The last week is a recovery week that includes a race.

Speedwork must have good recoveries in order to cope with the intensity. We start with a longer repetition session so that the pace can be slow. Over the first three weeks the distance of the reps decreases as the pace increases. The final week is a pyramid session that is a combination of all the paces. The way to run all of these sessions is for the first rep to be the slowest, the reps

in the middle to be the same pace and the last rep to be the fastest. With the pyramid session the last two reps must both be faster than the first two reps.

In this phase the Thursday session is at an easy pace rather than race pace with the distance gradually getting greater. The last week is shorter but is the first week of race pace training.

We start right into long runs in the first week but they are only 25km. They should be done at as slow a pace as is needed to complete them. In fact the pace of these runs is not important at all. The main goal is to deplete your glycogen and to do that all you need to do is cover the distance. Walking is acceptable especially if you are planning to run/walk the marathon.

The experienced marathoners should be able to cope with three long runs in a row but for the novice marathoners it is safer to have a race instead in the second week. The time you run in the 10km race in the final week will be a benchmark for you to improve on by the time you run the predictor race with two weeks to go.

One advantage of a minimalist program is a decreased risk of injury as a result of overtraining. One of the main reasons that runners embark on a minimalist program is in fact because they are injured from overtraining.

When Alberto Salazar was training for his first marathon he became injured and was not able to train properly. He overcame the injury with a limited time to go and still went out and ran the fastest debut marathon ever. After this he trained harder than ever but was only able to improve marginally on his times.

Intraining running and triathlon club member Vicki Pearson was injured while training for Sydney 2000 marathon. With ten weeks to go she ran her first 25km long run. After this she was only able to train three to four times a week with only an occasional speed session. The only runs beyond 20km were a half marathon race with seven weeks to go, a 24km run with four weeks to go, and a 30km with three weeks to go. Despite all of these problems she ran her first marathon comfortably in 4:51.

Another reason that runners have for doing minimalist training is that they do not have the time or desire to train more. Grete Waitz ran her first marathon after having never gone beyond 25km. She set a world record and still refused to train like a marathoner until she had set a few more records.

These are just a few examples of runners who ran less than what is accepted but still succeeded gloriously. If they can do it then you can too. Ignore the conventional wisdom of how you should train and go out with the knowledge that sometimes less is better.

Steve Manning writes the footman column for Runners World. He is aiming for his 20th marathon next year and has a personal best of 2:33.