

I have often advised female athletes that if they want to run like a man they should train like (and preferably with) a man. Martin Kennard's self taught approach to running outlined below is therefore particularly useful to those of you who have scoured the books searching for all the answers.

There is also another well accepted saying that it requires seven years to make an athlete. Martin therefore still has room for improvement although he admits that his rate has improvement has slowed significantly, so don't expect all the answers below.

**Gillian Castka**  
Captain, HKLRRC

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## **Marathon Mileage**

*By: Martin Kennard*

### **Introduction**

Kitty asked me to write something about marathon training for the HKLRRC website. My reaction was that club members would be better off speaking to experienced runners like Gillian Castka and Sheila Purves, both of whom know running much better than I. I'm just a layman who came to running because a knee injury stopped me from being able to play football about five years ago. I run lots but have to work tremendously hard in order to try and compete with other more naturally talented athletes in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, I'm happy to write a few words about training and my perspective on what constitutes good training.

There are no great secrets behind distance running. To a large extent, your success, or lack of it, reflects the effort that you put in. It's my contention that there are dozens of potentially excellent marathon runners out there in Hong Kong that don't get the results they are capable of because they don't put in the necessary training. In this short piece, for what it's worth, I'm going to write about my own experiences with establishing a maintaining high mileage.

### **Consistency/Variation**

It's important to establish a routine and to make sure that you stick to it. If this can be achieved, over time your body will adapt and come to 'know' the course that it's running.

Most serious marathon training programmes that I have come across stress the importance of doing two long runs a week. Even in hot and steamy Hong Kong it's possible to run for a couple of hours or more on a Sunday morning and at least seventy five minutes during the middle of the week. If you 'listen to your body' and adjust according to the conditions, weather should rarely be cited as an excuse for not getting

out there and doing what you have to do. Of course, it's important to do some separate speed training sessions too but these can also be incorporated into long runs by trying to finish faster than you started out and adding some 100-200m 'striders' to the end of these Sunday and Wednesday sessions. I also try to ensure there is plenty of variation in the surfaces that I run on by mixing up road, track, trail and even the occasional treadmill session (which is always ran on an incline). This helps prevent both injury and boredom.

### **Hard/Easy**

The hard easy principle is important too. Never follow a long run with a second long or speed work with a tempo run. One has to be careful not to introduce too much new stuff into a training programme as this brings with it the risk of injury. Last year I suffered a bad bout of sciatica and this was probably brought on by introducing a second weekly intervals session into my pre marathon schedule.

### **Percentages**

Making the jump up to a high volume training schedule doesn't happen overnight. My weekly average was something around 40km during the first year of training. The next year that grew to about 60kms per week. It was only in my fourth year of running that I hit a weekly average of more than 100 kilometres per week. By the same token, it's a good idea to restrict your week on increase in training to 5-10% per week and to consolidate every fourth week by reducing mileage again.

### **No excuses**

The next important point related to the above is to avoid giving oneself excuses for not training. Let's face it the weather conditions in Hong Kong are hardly ideal for nine months of the year. Most of us work long hours too, so feeling too tired is a handy get out for many. Mind you, how many times have you started a run feeling off colour but ended it feeling a whole lot better? What about illness? Obviously, it's daft to run if you are unwell. However, often the mere mention of the word 'Monday' is enough to send me to the toilet! So how do we know if we are genuinely sick? I find a heart rate monitor (HRM) a useful tool for this purpose. If you wake up feeling under the weather, you can strap on a HRM and get a pulse reading. Should your resting pulse rate be 5-10 beats higher than usual the chances are that you are either genuinely sick or about to be so.

### **Diet**

I don't know if this is a personal thing but since taking up distance running I've found that I crave good food. Whilst Hong Kong is perhaps the culinary capital of the world, it's difficult to eat out and get a balanced meal. For that reason, I always bring my own food into work.

Last week I listened to the UK's new health star stating that we really should be looking to get at least seven portions of fruit and vegetables a day. He stated that five was an

underestimation. Added to that, we should really look to limit our intake of red meat. A rule of thumb that I picked up on recently was that that maximum amount of red meat we consume should be roughly equivalent in size to two small sausages eaten three times a week. Food is our fuel so we ought to focus on consuming the right stuff. As for alcohol, little and often is my adage. I drink with food most days of the week and have no intention of stopping. To me, the only problem with alcohol is making sure that you are sufficiently hydrated. In the endless summer months this can be difficult to achieve.

## **Outcomes**

One significant outcome that usually comes about after a sustained period of high mileage programme is weight loss. This is fantastic news for two reasons. First, this comes about without any dieting. In fact, you should find yourself doing the reverse and eating more. Secondly, if you are carrying less around with you the next, almost inevitable, result is that you will find yourself running faster and this can usually be achieved without having done anything more sophisticated than having added some volume to your training programme. Beware though! Improvements can be substantial at first but miniscule over time. Between my first and second marathon I knocked off eighteen minutes. Since then, I have only brought my time down by a further six minutes in three attempts. Furthermore, despite having done the miles you may find that your breakthrough doesn't occur at the first attempt.

If you do find yourself in the tiny minority of people who do not improve despite the extra training, there are many other aspects of your general health that will have improved. Your blood pressure will probably be lower, the level of good cholesterol in your body (HDL) will have gone up whilst your body fat ratio will have come down. The chances are that you will have fewer days of sickness throughout the year too. Best of all, you can enjoy a second breakfast of the day come 9.30 am at work. (This is the clincher for me).

I have picked up most of my ideas about running through conversations with more experienced athletes in Hong Kong. There is also a large amount of literature on the net and available in bookshops. Some of my personal favourites are outlined below.

## **References**

1. Advanced Marathonning. Pete Pfitzinger and Scott Douglas
2. Road Racing for Serious Runners. Pete Pfitzinger and Scott Douglas
3. Daniels Running Formula. Jack Daniels
4. Hal Higdon's Marathon Training Guide – [www.halhigdon.com](http://www.halhigdon.com)
5. A training system for distance runners – Beginning, Developing and Advanced. Chris Wardlaw
6. Mike Gratton's hard marathon training schedules (linked with [www.runnersworld.co.uk](http://www.runnersworld.co.uk))
7. Conversations in steamers with Stuart Leonard

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