

Ultra-Running: An inside view from Down Under

Meet Steven Williams, 29, currently of Albany, South West Australia. Born and bred on the Isle of Wight, affectionately known as “Larry” to most, he has spread his wings and now he is conquering the harshest terrains that the southern hemisphere has to offer. Four years ago, he started running and pretty much hasn’t stopped. As someone who is very happy with stumbling around the odd half marathon here and there, I wanted to get an insight in to what drives someone to run these (obscene) kinds of distances, and how they go about preparing for them.

So Larry, what drives you to run such distances?

There are several reasons why I like to run so far. One, it’s a great way to see new places, the further you go, the more you can see. This is especially true when running in mountains, bush and the country side. This is what started it for me. I



wanted to see how far I can go, it’s a challenge, physically but more so mentally. Another reason is that I like to prove to myself that anything is possible. In its simplest form running is putting one foot in front of the other, there isn't really anything difficult about that. The biggest challenge is believing that you can run 10k, 50k, 100k or 100 miles, once you master this, anything is possible. Running also provides an outlet for my mind to relax and to bring peace to my thoughts. It gives me a break from daily stresses, it is my meditation. I love nothing more than getting out in the bush for 4 or 5 hours before dawn. I love this solitude, peace and quiet.

More recently since my son was born, I want to show him that anything is achievable. If you have a dream and work hard enough you can achieve anything.

How on Earth did you get into ultra-marathon running?

I started running because hiking the local trails near my house in Korea was too slow. I started out running the flats and hiking hills, then I was running the whole 6k out and back. My next challenge was to run to the next peak and so on and so on. My first trail race was 30k, nearly double my longest previous run. I couldn't walk for the next week! But from that point on I was hooked. It just happened that trail races are usually in the ultra-category; and who wouldn't want to run 100k or 100miles through some beautiful mountains?

What is your training schedule like for a run of this magnitude?

This year I have two major goals; a 100k in May and my first ever 100miler in November. For the race in May I went back and looked over my training for the previous 100k I ran in 2015. By doing this I realised I ran hardly any distance compared to what I thought I was doing (average 48k per week over 19 weeks). I used this as a basis for my current training block, and aimed to improve on what I did before, so more miles and more elevation. I work on a 4 week rotation. Three weeks build, with the third week all about volume, and then one week easier.

I will reassess after the 100k, and make my next focused training block more specific towards the 100 miler (lots more elevation). I know my body can't handle the fatigue from big weeks of training and in the grand scheme I am still relatively new to ultra-running, so I keep my mileage lower than a lot of people would assume I'd need to. I am currently averaging 63.3k per week, and aim to gradually increase for the next two 4 week blocks before tapering the last two weeks before my race.

You must be susceptible to injuries, what's your best tip for staying injury free?

Simply put: strength training. As much as getting the mileage in, building strength helps maintain good form as you get to the end points of the races. As the terrain with trail running is varied and unforgiving, good all round strength is essential to prevent injuries. I try to train my glutes, quads and hamstrings as much as possible. I don't have time to go the gym so I just do simple bodyweight exercises at home.



Weighted Lunges: Great for a whole lower leg work out. For an added twist try doing reverse lunges too.



Kettle Bell squats: How low can you go? Great for building explosive glute power. Just keep those knees behind your toes!



Hip extensions over a gym ball: Concentrated effort on the glutes and hamstrings combined. Adding the gym ball really challenges your core stability too!

Exercise Tip!

Supercharge your glutes to give yourself a power house generator to take on those climbs or see you through the final dash to the finish. Commence operation J-Lo. GO!

How do you juggle the life/training balance? It must be full on...

My work/life/training balance is a tricky one. I try to keep my running as invisible as possible. So I do a lot of my runs starting at around at 5am. This way I am home before my wife needs to get ready for work, and I can look after our son. I also take my son for buggy runs, and hiking in his baby carrier. I hope the hiking is good cross training, especially carrying 8kg strapped to my chest. I find that if I don't run in the morning, it is very hard to fit a run in later in the day, and I am usually very tired from working all day, I am either working or on call 24hours a day in my job managing a hotel. It's all about creating the time and then making sure you stick to the plan.

What's the next challenge for you?

My next challenge is a 106k race on 20th May. Then my main goal for the year is a 105 mile race starting on 17th November, and probably taking 48 hours to complete.



Ultra-marathon running, it seems, is about far more than just putting one foot in the other. It takes preparation, motivation and an appreciation for your body and a desire to achieve. Whilst it's not for me, I intend to apply some of these

tactics to my middle distance running. But for those of you more energetic than I, I hope this provides an insight to how you may go about planning for an event like this. Plus remember to include strength training, and you too can finish an ultra-marathon looking as happy as Larry.

Sam Downer BSc MCSP