

RAZIQ RAUF

RUN
THIS IS
RUN
RUNNING
RUN

**A CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD OF RUNNING,
EXPLORING THE CULTURE, HISTORY, BRANDS,
RACES AND PEOPLE BEHIND IT**



***WE
RUN***

Whether we run for necessity, joy or discovery, we run. And we've always run. It's human instinct; an age-old impulse. Survival. Evolution. Competition. It's all fundamental human behaviour with roots in deep evolutionary past that compels us to push our bodies into motion.

Even if running to hunt is now largely confined to a few native hunter-gatherer tribes dotted around the planet, the human body remains uniquely built for running long distances. Our notably long legs are attached to a skeletal structure that has adapted its gait and makeup of its musculature over time to help us run, even to the point that we have developed a specific ligament to stabilize our large heads. Our cardiovascular system has developed to carry more blood around the body, taking oxygen to our extremities more efficiently, and helping to thermoregulate our bodies via the evaporation of sweat. We're the only animal to have our own built-in cooling system. Genetically and ancestrally, we are running machines.

The need to run for survival has moved on from flexing superior stamina over a lion to a reaction to unfavourable blood panels resulting from the newly sedentary lifestyle that multiple industrial revolutions have foisted upon us. That running is one of the most highly recommended solutions to the increased prevalence of illnesses that come attached to our 21st-century lives is simply more evidence that human beings are born to run.

Take the example of our brains becoming active during this exertion. The endocannabinoid system starts producing cannabis-like compounds that regulate pain, mood and appetite, enhancing motivation and endurance as a glorious byproduct of this natural mind-body connection. Even if the exact biochemistry is not fully understood by the runner, the sensation of the 'runner's high' can become addictive – one that is as compelling as it is fulfilling.

Now, without the flight part of the fight-or-flight impulse charging our running, we are making choices to run. For competition, for friendship, for health. They are all compelling reasons to run, especially when those mental benefits are considered. The freedom that you feel as you course through nature is a stress reliever, and as the act of running becomes less difficult, you are encouraged by your more able body, and you set new goals. Those goals can ratchet up and up. Running begets more running. Movement becomes joy. Running becomes a primal urge again, but you're not being chased by a lion any more.

The impulse has transformed to deep purpose, and that sits comfortably with our desire for progress as a civilization, doesn't it? Unshackled by either hunting game or being hunted, it has a new perspective. There are records to be broken, charities to raise money for, issues to raise awareness about, personal health objectives. Despite running being an inherent part of our beings, now it is a choice, and – more often than not – it is a positive one that is thankfully borne far less out of fear for our lives. The reasons to run now are vast, but more than ever, they are now firmly rooted in desire rather than necessity.

The way you run now is the same as everyone who came before you who ran. While the physical act itself has remained largely unchanged over time – simply augmented by various strands of science – the ways in which we've run, the reasons, the methods, and how we come to the sport are deeply personal. When, why, where and how we run is unique to every runner, but however you run, it's always just you, and it always has been. So go and run.

When We Run

OUR FIRST RUN

Do you remember your first run? I'm not talking about the first time you ever ran. That would've happened moments after your very first toddling steps, because it's in our nature to run. I'm talking about the first time you left your home with the sole purpose of going for a run. Maybe it was in adulthood, and it was more difficult than you expected it to be. You were hoping to reclaim that feeling of freedom that you remember from running through the school playground, but your legs were heavier and your lungs more restrictive. For some, that initial disappointment is enough to put them off running again forever, but for those who persevere, it can become an all-consuming habit. Either way, what a commitment that first step was, whether it was out of your front door or onto a treadmill. That was the moment you conquered a new frontier in your mind. That was the moment that you became a runner.

AS A CHILD

About that playground experience. Whether it's during your school break or in the park with friends, running is a central part of childhood. With rules meted out left, right and centre by our parents about where we can go, how far we can go, and who we can go to those as-yet-unspecified places with, we took it to the limits (and maybe a little further), but time was always of the essence. Young minds are filled with the desire to explore, so quickly does it.

It's also likely that your first formal experience of running was at school. It's where you would have run your first 100-metre dash, and tried out for the athletics team. School is also where you may have been handed an unreasonable amount of laps to run as a punishment. That's not a way of instilling a healthy lifelong habit into a child, but maybe, like me, you joined the cross-country or athletics team because you weren't quite good enough for the football team, and the hard work that you undertook, stride after stride, has ending up resonating long into adulthood. That running in our formative years lives with us forever.

YOUR DAILY RUN

You run every day. It's your routine. Daily movement is an important part of the goal of a long, healthy life, so why not running? All you have to do is pull on a pair of running shoes and head out of the door. It's much less hassle than going to the pool or getting the bike out of the shed. Maybe you've worked your daily run into a run streak, or maybe you think about running the same way that you think about brushing your teeth – it's just something you do.

Either way, the physical and mental benefits of running as a ritual are clear. Running helps you sleep better, and it helps you clear your mind, which is nothing new. The Latin phrase *solvitur ambulando* means 'it is solved by walking'. Is the phrase about a mysterious mind-body connection, or simply outlining a practical solution to a complex problem? That's up to you: the runner.

IT'S RACE DAY

This is everything you've been training for. You know you're ready because you followed the plan your coach made for you, and you laid out your kit and nutrition last night and posted a photo of your flat lay. All those dozens, hundreds of miles have led to this. You're so goal-oriented that there is a clear distinction in your mind between those training runs and today. It's all about today. You ate your usual pre-race breakfast, and got to the race in plenty of time. You're in the lead corral, in the pack with the fastest runners, closest to the start line, so there won't be too much human traffic. You know what pace you need to run at, and you're going to hit your goal time. You visualize that finisher's medal being placed around your neck moments after crossing that finish line, and you begin to feel the nerves for the first time. The starter's gun goes off.

Why We Run

HEALTH IS EVERYTHING

Even running for five minutes a day can bring untold health benefits, like a reduced risk of early death, which is quite a big one. You might be running to improve your cardiovascular health, mental health, weight management or something else, like bone health or boosting your immune system, but you will simultaneously reap the benefits in so many other areas as well. For instance, if you're training for a marathon with a two-hour zone-two training run, where you're keeping your heart rate in the low-intensity steady-state popularized by author and coach, Matt Fitzgerald in his 2014 book, *80/20 Running*, and you run with a group, you can add a mental-health-boosting social element. Running can do so much for your well-being. You just have to do it.

PLEASURE THROUGH PAIN

While many will say that running for pleasure is the antithesis to running for performance, there is pleasure to be gained from achieving one's goals – for instance, the joy of a successful track session that you know will deliver benefits on race day – but when it's distinct from goals, running for pleasure can be a game-changer. Improving your health can be a part of the happiness gleaned from running, but it's a focus on pleasure in the moment that can really have an effect. The 'runner's high' is a complex release of hormones (endorphins, dopamine, endocannabinoids) created by the body that can quell pain or discomfort in favour of euphoria. That sensation can lead into the meditative flow state, where deep thinking can occur alongside the calming rhythmic cadence of your feet. Yes, it sounds like free drugs, and because the only payment is a few miles of running, it can be the thing that keeps many runners lacing up their shoes. Remember: pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.

OPPOSITE

Race participants experiencing the 'runner's high'.





FINDING YOURSELF

Setting goals and working towards them is a fundamental aspect of human nature’s desire for improvement and achievement. It’s why the marathon is a bucket list event – it’s an incredibly difficult feat to achieve and requires months of training both your body and mind. Crossing that finish line after 26.2 miles is huge. In the process of preparing yourself to complete the race, you’ve proven to yourself and to anyone who’s paying attention that you are capable of following and executing a plan. The intense solitude of that training, even when among others, will have allowed for introspection and a quiet but constant acknowledgement of your abilities, and every physical and mental challenge that you overcome teaches you a lesson about yourself that you can take and use in other parts of your life. In the eternal search to understand ourselves, the power of the human spirit reigns supreme.

EXPLORE YOUR CITY

When I moved to Los Angeles, I decided I would explore my new home by running it. I started by signing up to races in as many different parts of this enormous city as possible, and then started my search for a run club that fitted as many of my criteria as possible. Through that casual but purposeful tourism, I now know LA like the back of my hand – both the good bits and the bad – and it all came through running the streets. In such a car-centric city, this knowledge has been invaluable, even when sitting in traffic.

Exploring a city you’ve travelled to is another kettle of fish, though. Once you’ve set your suitcase down in your hotel room, pulling on your running shoes and exploring this foreign, exciting locale that you’ve landed in is a great way to start a trip. If you’ve travelled with others, you’ll be the one they turn to when they’re wondering where the nearest coffee shop is. You’ll likely be able to reel off a few, including the one that’s probably the best, judging by the long line out of the door. There’s no better way to understand the beautifully complex relationships between a place and its people than on foot, and how better than at speed?

OPPOSITE

Tommie Runz participating in a marathon.

Where We Run

IN THE CITY

Maybe it's because they're morning miles near your home that you're doing to get them over with for the day, or because urban scenery is more of a monotonous grey haze than scenic, but roads can often struggle to inspire. While the reliability of a concrete jungle (assuming no trees have taken it upon themselves to crack the pavement with their roots) can provide a wonderful clean slate for a runner to experiment with their workouts, the thrill of the open road somehow doesn't quite apply to running. While car-free streets during a marathon are a road runner's dream, there can be a certain drudgery associated with miles undertaken on asphalt. Regardless, we persevere, because these miles aren't going to run themselves.

ESCAPE TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

It's no accident that green is the internationally recognized colour for mental health awareness. Green is the colour most associated with being outdoors; and nature, with its tweeting birds and warm sunshine, can be a beautifully calming experience. Green shoots, that you may have grown yourself, are also linked to symbols of growth and hope, which are strong themes in mental health recovery. When mental health conditions are estimated to cost the global economy \$1.6 trillion per year globally, maybe more time spent in green spaces is wise. All that means that running in nature is a wonderful way to live life.

OPPOSITE

Trail runners descend the slopes.



ON THE HAMSTER WHEEL

Lovingly nicknamed the Dreadmill or the Shredmill, depending on whether the person lives with their glass half empty or half full, this piece of gym equipment is very reasonably likened to a hamster wheel, and we're better than hamsters, aren't we? While treadmills can provide a level of consistency, accessibility and shelter from the weather, stints on the treadmill are most often spoken about as monotonous running for running's sake. During times of poor air quality, though, the treadmill can offer that place to get your miles in even when everything might literally be on fire. Maybe it's worth learning to love the treadmill.

TRACK NIGHT

While this is where we find out who the fastest human on the planet is every four years at the Olympic Games, when was the last time you tested out how fast you can go? The freedom of flying down a track as fast as you can, with no distractions, straining every sinew in a bid to shave milliseconds off your time, is difficult to replicate elsewhere, and yet it's far less common for adults to take to the track. Going back to that 80/20 workout principle, while 80 per cent of our training should be in zone two, the other 20 per cent of your running should be a high-octane workout, and getting a sweat on at the track certainly fits the bill.

OPPOSITE

Runners at track night.



How We Run

ALL ON YOUR OWN

The loneliness of the long-distance runner has been pondered for some time, but circumstance often dictates that we run alone. Whether it’s due to flexibility of our schedules versus the more rigid scheduling of team sports, the desire to run at a specific pace as part of a training regimen, or simply to have some peace and quiet for a moment to think during some alone time, running solo is a popular pursuit. In terms of self-improvement mentally, one of the key benefits to running alone is being able to gauge and improve your motivation levels, because the only person on the hook for you going on the run is you. All you have to do is lace up your shoes and take that first step out of the door. Easy, right? Keep telling yourself that.

FIND YOUR RUN CLUB

From school athletics and university cross-country teams to the local running store events, urban run crews, and the spate of corporate running-related activities that have been flooding Strava in increasing numbers, running groups have existed for centuries, in many different formats. In their purest form, run clubs are a place of solace where you can convene with your peers and measure your hard work. The idea of community is different for everybody, but there’s definitely something out there for you. Maybe there will be some freebies at the end. Maybe it’ll just be friendship.

OPPOSITE

A solo runner taking on 50km (31 miles) between Altadena and the Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles runs past the Arclight Dome, Hollywood.





FIND A RUNNING PARTNER

Finding a regular running partner is one of the holy grails of running. It might be someone that you meet at an organized running club, or someone you met online through a classified ad (yes, this happens), but the search for that special someone is long and arduous. When you find that person who lives nearby, runs at a similar pace to you, has a similar world view and interests to you, and might even want to train for races together, hold on to them tight. You can go on adventures of self-discovery together, book trips to faraway places and save on the hotel room, and have some real, unavoidable accountability when you have to wake up at 5am for your long run.

I AM SPEED

Laymen and beginners alike see running a marathon as the main event of road running. You may have grown up hearing about the running of a marathon as a once-in-a-lifetime race, but with the platforming of the seven marathon majors (which is expanding to eight and then nine races around the world, dependent on qualification), the new challenge is to run all of the major marathons in one calendar year. Running multiple marathons in a year is difficult enough even without considering winning a bib in the lotteries or achieving qualification times, as well as the expense of travel, and the time off work. Has the marathon become a normal distance?

OPPOSITE

Runners competing in
the Tokyo Marathon.