**Beacon Hill Striders: Performance Running**

Beacon Hill Striders Performance Running - <https://beaconhillstriders.co.uk/> - aims to advise, guide, encourage, & inspire aspirational runners to adopt good/best training practice. To further this goal, I shall produce each month a short article offering both some insight and practical guidance. We open with an article that looks at the anatomy of a successful cross-country season experienced by the author.

**BHS Monthly Article: October 2017**

**The Anatomy of a Successful Cross-Country Season**

**(In Praise of the Steady Run)**

This month’s article seeks to offer any aspirational runner embarking on their cross-country (XC) season both a template to follow, and a steer in terms of balancing training between aerobic ‘steady’ running and more intense sessions.

The article focuses on a 14-week period of training (September to December 1985) in which I won the overall individual North Midlands XC League title. I shall outline the training completed month by month, and then draw together the salient points that any aspirational runner should take from my experience.

Prior to the period under scrutiny, I had spent a low-key couple of months running on average just 30 miles per week and enjoying my ‘summer holidays’ both at home and abroad. (I was a teacher at the time). The final week prior to the period under scrutiny was a 45-mile week involving six easy runs of 30 to 60 minutes duration.

**September** (4 weeks)

With the opening race of the 4-race League series scheduled for the middle of October (end of Week 6) my initial focus was very much on building a more solid base following the relative inactivity of the previous couple of months. I opted to follow a hard/easy pattern of training, with Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays involving short aerobic recovery runs (plus some additional basic supplementary exercises: sit-ups, push-ups etc.). From Week 2 onwards two runs were completed on Tuesdays & Thursdays.

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| **Week** | **M** | **T** | **W** | **TH** | **F** | **S** | **S** | **Total:** | **MPW:** | **Monthly** | **Runs:** |
| 1 | 30m | 65m | 30m | 65m | 30m | 65m | 90m | 6H 15m | 55 | 55 | 7 |
| 2 | 30m | 85m (2) | 30m | 90m (2) | 30m | 60m | 90m | 6H 55m | 60 | 115 | 9 |
| 3 | 30m | 95m (2) | 30m | 95m (2) | 30m | x | 95m | 6H 15m | 52 | 167 | 8 |
| 4 | 30m | 95m (2) | 30m | 95m (2) | 30m | 60m | 90m | 7H 10m | 60 | **227** | 9 |

The weekends involved longer runs with a traditional Sunday long run of 90+ minutes becoming a regular weekly feature. In September, I ran every day bar the Saturday of the third week when I had to attend a wedding. The vast majority of the running was done off-road, much of it on quite demanding hilly terrain in the Charnwood Forest area near my Loughborough home. Towards the end of Week 4, I introduced my first up-tempo session of the period, running a fartlek session on mixed terrain that involved six ‘hard’ efforts of 3 minutes duration, with a similar 3-minute recovery.

Summary: During September, I completed 33 runs (average of 8.25 runs per week), covering a total of 227 Miles. All the runs bar one were ‘aerobic’ in nature, though the hilly terrain ensured that much of this was ‘challenging’ rather than ‘easy’.

**October** (4 weeks)

During October I built upon the foundations of the previous month by maintaining a very similar pattern of running. From Week 5 onwards it became apparent that I was gaining fitness as on the steady hour runs (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday) my training diary (from which the data in this article has been sourced) shows comments such as: ‘felt good’; ‘moving well’; ‘moving smoothly and relaxed’; ‘strong pace’; ‘finished strongly’. The steady running was clearly taking effect.

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| **Week** | **M** | **T** | **W** | **TH** | **F** | **S** | **S** | **Total:** | **MPW:** | **Monthly** | **Runs:** |
| 5 | 30m | 95m (2) | 30m | 95m (2) | 30m | 60m | 95m | 7H 15m | 64 | 64 | 9 |
| 6 | 30m | 90m (2) | 30m | 90m (2) | x | **60m** | 90m (2) | 6H 30m | 56 | 120 | 9 |
| 7 | 30m | 110m (2) | 30m | 90m (2) | 30m | 45m | 90m | 7H 05m | 62 | 182 | 9 |
| 8 | 45m | 80m | 65m | 95m  | 30m | 60m | 95m | 7H 50m | 67 | **249** | 7 |

The Saturday of Week 5 was the same Fartlek as for Week 4 but with a shorter (2-minute) recovery between the efforts. By now I felt ready to race, and surprised myself (given how little ‘faster’ running I had done for over three months) how well I ran in the opening XC race of the season at a sun-drenched Markeaton Park, Derby (finishing 5th, covering the advertised 9.6K in 28-47). The quality of the race was sound with both the winner and the second being current English International XC runners.

The following Thursday (Week 7) I joined a group Fartlek session (a similar session to those I had run in Weeks 4 and 5) with the (Loughborough) University middle/long distance group. Week 8 was School half-term, which I spent up in Keswick (Monday to Friday), and involved some slow-paced runs due to the unevenness of the rock-strewn Lake District trails. (The week also involved a significant number of hilly walks). The Saturday was another Fartlek, this time involving prolonged efforts on some hills.

Summary: During October I completed 34 runs (average of 8.5 runs per week), covering a total of 249 Miles. The vast majority of runs remained ‘aerobic’ in nature, with one weekly effort (session or race) involving demanding work.

**November** (4 weeks)

On the Tuesday of Week 9 I joined the University distance running squad for my first track session of the winter (24 laps of slow/fast 200s: a session based on the ‘Oregon 30/40 200m Workout’). I was again surprised as to how well I went, covering the 24 laps (6 miles) in 32-30 and leaving a number of very talented athletes in my wake. I therefore approached the Saturday race with some confidence. The confidence was not misplaced as I finished 2nd 100m down on the winner of Race 1, covering the advertised 10.2Km - on a fast but undulating course at Berry Hill Park, Mansfield - in 29-54. (I assume that the exact distance was less than 10K)

The following week (Week 10) I again joined the University squad for a track session of 5 x 1M (60 seconds, 200m jog recovery). I averaged 4-55 despite the wet and windy conditions. This effort, so soon after Saturday’s race (or the 2-Hour Sunday run at the end of the week), may have been a mistake as the following week (Week 11) I came down with a heavy cold that curtailed my training, with just one effort session (a controlled 5M Tempo Run) on the Thursday.

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| **Week** | **M** | **T** | **W** | **TH** | **F** | **S** | **S** | **Total:** | **MPW:** | **Monthly** | **Runs:** |
| 9 | 30m | 90m (2) | 30m | 90m (2) | x | **60m** | 90m | 6H 30m | 57 | 57 | 8 |
| 10 | 30m | 90m (2) | 45m | 90m (2) | 30m | 60m | 120m | 7H 45m | 68 | 125 | 9 |
| 11 | 30m | 90m (2) | 30m | 90m (2) | 30m | 30m | 60m | 6H | 52 | 177 | 9 |
| 12 | 30m | 60m | 45m | 70m (2) | x | **60m** | 95m | 6H | 53 | **230** | 7 |

I was still not fully recovered the following week (Week 12), but toed the line at the 3rd Race (at Wollaton Park, Nottingham) in the XC League series, as I knew I was now in a challenging position for the overall title. The decision to race was vindicated by a 3rd place finish, 18 seconds down on the race winner. With the winner of the previous two fixtures absent, I was now in lead position for the overall title, with a 50-second cushion to the next best placed runner (positions being decided by aggregate time).

Summary: During November I completed 33 runs (average of 8.25 runs per week), covering a total of 230 Miles. Again, most of my runs remained ‘aerobic’ in nature, with (apart from Week 9) one weekly effort involving challenging work.

**December** (2 weeks)

Just two weeks remained before the final XC League fixture. The following week (Week 13) I resisted the temptation to back-off, and recorded a 67-mile week including a ‘medium discomfort’ (tempo) run of 5 Miles in 25-10 on the Thursday evening, having eased off after hitting the 3 Mile mark in 14-50.

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| **Week** | **M** | **T** | **W** | **TH** | **F** | **S** | **S** | **Total:** | **MPW:** | **Monthly** | **Runs:** |
| 13 | 30m | 90m (2) | 50m | 90m (2) | 30m | 80m | 90m | 7H 40m | 67 | 67 | 9 |
| 14 | 30m | 90m (2) | 50m | 90m (2) | x | **60m** | 95m | 6H 55m | 60 | **127** | 8 |

During the final week (Week 14) I again joined the Tuesday night track session averaging 4-45 for each repetition of the 4 x 1M session (2 minutes jog recovery).

Saturday’s race (at Sutton-in-Ashfield) was something to look forward to. With a 50 second cushion, only a mishap during the race was likely to derail my challenge for the overall title. Fortunately, there were no unforeseen incidents, and I could run the final lap of the race with gusto, closing down fast on the eventual victor, narrowly missing the race win by a mere second. Sunday’s run (despite much stiffness from the previous day’s exertions) was a most satisfying experience, as I reflected upon my efforts over the Autumn months.

Overall Summary: Across the 14-week period (98 days) I had run on 93 days, completing 117 runs in total. Of these runs, 54 had been runs of an hour or more. (The vast majority of the others being 30-minute recovery runs). This consistency was reflected on a week-by-week basis as I averaged just under 60 miles a week, with a lowest weekly total of 52 miles, & a highest of 68. Most of the runs (104) had been ‘aerobic’ in nature, with the remainder involving 4 races and 9 specific training sessions (Fartlek, Track Repetitions, and Tempo Runs). In short, 90% of runs were easy/steady, with the remainder involving challenging training. (A mix of training that follows the classical polarized training model).

**Lessons**:

So, what lessons can be drawn - from my experiences over thirty years ago - for the benefit of the aspirational runner of today about to embark upon their XC season? I would argue that the main take-away points are as follows:

* Frequent (daily) and consistent training is more important than an overall volume figure. (My overall volume was relatively modest, but it was consistent)
* Create a base of steady running before introducing specific sessions.
* Frequent intense (hard) sessions are not necessary, and may indeed be counter-productive. A single, well-structured, session per week may well suffice.
* Mix up your intense sessions. (Include: Fartlek; track sessions; and tempo runs)
* Do not underestimate the power of steady running, especially over off-road, hilly terrain. (A regime of frequent steady hourly runs is a powerful training method)
* Target your training effort towards specific races. Always have a Plan.

Finally, the true test of any training plan is whether it enables you to achieve your goals. ‘Smart’ training always trumps ‘hard’ training. Learn from experience.

**About the Author**:

Alan Maddocks was a successful runner, competing from the mid 1970s to the early 2000s. He represented Wales, British Students, and Leicestershire, winning several local/regional races. Over the past decade Alan has advised and guided a small group of talented young runners/triathletes on to success at local, regional, national, and international level. In addition, he offers consultancy services, and is a regular contributor to the ‘Left Spike’ Fanzine. Alan can be contacted at striders1@hotmail.co.uk

(For further details, see: <https://beaconhillstriders.co.uk/>)