

DORKING & MOLE VALLEY AC

PIXHAM LANE SPORTS GROUND, PIXHAM LANE, DORKING, SURREY, RH4 1PQ

Steve's guide to GETTING QUICKER FOR FREE

Are you an inexperienced runner who wants to be a bit faster at races? With very little extra effort? The read on....

GET TO THE RACE EARLY

So you can find a parking place, queue for the loos, sort your gear out, and warm up.

WARM UP PROPERLY - 800m* should do it - half a mile.

Done gently, it will not tire you at all. Instead you will be able to start at a faster pace with no extra effort – you are saving seconds already.

It will also heat you up, so you won't be tempted to wear extra layers on the start line - undressing during a race wastes seconds.

*DMVAC coach Rob Russell says more would be better.

FIND THE FINISH

While you warm up, take a look at the finish.

Is it just around a corner, visible from miles away, down hill, up hill, muddy...?

Think how you will run this last bit.

And pick yourself a nice visible sprint marker 50-100m before the finish - you will be needing this later.

LEAVE THE JUNK BEHIND

This is not training, it is a race - you don't need a phone, a little bottle of water, a fleece, GPS, heart rate monitor or lucky rabbits foot. You don't even need a watch.

MP3 players make runners stupid - trust me, I marshal races and see it frequent.

Wear only what you will need at cruising speed, not what you need to keep warm on the start line if you forgot to warm up.

No extra stuff tied around your waist - no one cares how big your bum is.

If you have worn too much, shove the excess in a hedge and get it back later.

THE START

However much you love your friends, stop the conversation when the race starts. You need the breath, and you need to focus.

Avoid starting too fast - many runners get caught-up in the initial rush, then run out of effort minutes later.

PACE

In my view, racing takes constant effort - so avoid speeding up when you are overtaken, for example.

A simple measure of effort is breathing: Aim for a constant breathing rate - and if you can hold a conversation, slowly increase your pace until you can't.

Maintain effort on hills, not speed. Walk really steep hills - then run again just before the top.

You will learn your best race pace through racing and training. Aids like a watch, a heart rate monitor, or GPS can assist with training.

LOOK WELL AHEAD – thinking makes you faster

Avoid follow-my-leader. Run your own race - not your friend's, nor the person in front's.

Particularly in cross-country, look past other runners for grip, gaps, route markers, hazards and anything else that may help or hinder you.

For example: people have a habit of queuing on either side of big puddles - so run right through the middle - although it may be deep, and wet shoes slow you down, so THINK.

Don't push in front of faster runners just before a narrow bit, but make sure you are in front of the slower runners. In a long narrow stretch, ask to pass if you are stuck behind a slower runner.

Keep your mind agile despite fatigue.

THANK THE MARSHALS - the only exception to saving your breath

This might cost you a second or so, but these folk have given up their time for you for free.

THE FINISH

You can get your breath back after the line, so when you pass the sprint marker you chose earlier

RUN LIKE HELL.

Sprint with all your might, while staying relaxed - and run quietly so others don't hear you coming up behind them - this is the wrong time to inspire the competition.

HAPPINESS IS THE KEY

You occasionally come across someone from the crush-kill-destroy school of self-motivation - in my view they are not doing themselves any favours.

My advice is: Relax into the event, enjoy the scenery, and try to ignore the discomfort.

Some runners learn psychological techniques that keep body and soul together through heavy training and competition – you might benefit.

A LITTLE EXTRA EFFORT - More drive and more fitness

If you want to improve week after week, don't be too easy on yourself.

The chances are that you are not running as hard as you are capable of running on any particular day, and this is part of the difference between you and the folk at the front.

In training, experiment with running so you are breathing a bit harder than usual and see how long you can hold on.

Go running with your same-speed friend. Chat on the flat bits, and race them hard up hills, DON'T stop at the top, recover as you jog down the other side.

Run with your faster friend. Don't keep apologising about being slow, use the breath to try to keep up. Push yourself and you will get faster today and fitter tomorrow, but not so hard that you get injured.

AVOID INJURY

If you are just starting running, be aware that injury is possible if you train too much too soon, or inappropriately – particularly if you are no longer a spring chicken.

Rapid fitness gain is beyond the scope of this rather gentle guide.

If you want to get fast fast, see an expert, read good books, and talk to experienced runners.

Steve Bush - 26 Dec 2013