The Fast Marathoner

Maybe you've been thinking about running a marathon later this season. If your only goal is to finish, which is a good idea if this will be your first time at this distance, all you need to do is put in some long runs. It will take about six runs of two to three hours done over eight to 10 weeks to have you ready to go the distance. Expect to do some walking every couple of miles both on the long runs and in the race.

Or maybe your purpose in running a marathon is simply to build a good base of aerobic endurance for running as a triathlete since it's hard to bike much in the winter where you live. Marathon-type training with long runs and hills will certainly do that for you, too.

But if you want to run a personal best time in a marathon while also building your running base before launching into full-time triathlon training, there's quite a bit more to it. In this case, training goes well beyond simply doing long runs.

What It Takes

First of all, you must forget the notion that weekly volume is the key to running a fast marathon. Increasing logged miles every week is not the way to get faster. Race-specific intensity is what will have you ready to run full out for 26.2 miles. Here are the workouts that will prepare you to run well in a marathon.

• Long run. Before you can train for speed you've got to first be able to go the distance. I call a "long run" for the marathon one that is two-and-a-half to

three hours in duration. Regardless of your race goal time this is as long as you need to run. Going longer won't give you any additional aerobic fitness, but will greatly increase your risk of injury and overtraining. Start from your longest run now and add 15 to 20 minutes each time you do one of these. The pace is moderate – about two minutes per mile slower than your 10k pace or heart rate zone 2 (Friel system).

• Hilly run. Besides the long run, this is the most valuable workout you can do early in the season. These will give you not only strength for hills on the marathon course, but also a more powerful stride.

• Tempo run. The longer a race is the more critical having a good sense of pace becomes. If you go out too fast you'll crash and burn. In fact, I encourage marathoners to break the race into three distinct parts with a unique pace for each (see "3-Part Pacing").

The basic tempo run is 30-45 minutes at the pace you'll use in miles 4 to 20 of the race. This is done following a 10- to 20-minute warm-up and is followed by a five- to 10-minute cool down.

The more advanced tempo-finish run comes at the end of a long run. For example, run 60 minutes at your long run pace described above, and then pick it up to tempo pace for another 30 minutes for a 90-minute workout. Gradually make the tempo portion longer until you run 60 minutes of long-run pace and 60 minutes of tempo. This is a great session for preparing you for the rigors of a marathon.

• Cruise intervals. These are mile repeats done a bit faster than your average marathon pace in order to improve muscular endurance. "Mile Repeats" below shows how many repeats to do and at what pace based on your marathon goal time. The recoveries between repeats are 200-meter walks. This is a grueling workout that comes after the basic endurance and hill training are completed. The pace will make the marathon seem easy.

• Downhill strides. The purpose here is to improve your running economy – how smoothly you run – while "inoculating" your legs against the quad soreness that typically shows up late in the marathon. On a two-percent grade run for one minute downhill at slower than top speed. This is best on a soft surface. Do not run these on concrete or asphalt. Concentrate on perfect form and relaxation on each one. Walk and jog slowly back up the hill. Get in eight to 12 of these in a workout.

• Cross-train. Don't run every day. Bike and swim on recovery days. Athletes in their 20s may run five or six times a week since they recover quickly. For every decade of life after age 30 subtract one day of running per week to a minimum of three.

Marathon Periodization

The following 12-week schedule is an example of one way to prepare using the workouts above. It assumes that you begin with a good base built with runs of two-and-a-half to three hours, and sound, total body strength developed in the weight room. The following suggested schedule is based on four-week

mesocycles. If over age 40 or prone to injury or overtraining you may be better off training in three-week periods. Every third or fourth week reduce the volume by half for five or six days and then test your progress on the sixth or seventh day. Be sure to separate the long and intense runs by 48 or more hours.

   • Weeks 1-4. Do a long run on a hilly course in weeks 1, 2, and 3. Also complete a basic tempo run each of the first three weeks. Include one cruise interval workout in weeks 2 and 3 starting with about one-fourth of what is indicated in the "Build to x Reps" column.

   • Weeks 5-8. Complete a long run on a rolling (not hilly) course in weeks 5 and 7. In weeks 6 and 8 do a tempo-finish run. Do cruise intervals in weeks 5, 6, and 7 adding one or two more reps each week. Also do downhill strides in the first three weeks of this block. Start with four and add one or two each week.

   • Weeks 9-12. You're now starting to taper for the marathon at the end of week 12. Reduce volume by 20 percent each week. In weeks 9 and 10 include tempo-finish runs of 90 minutes. Also maximize your cruise intervals and downhill strides in weeks 9 and 10. In week 11 include a basic tempo run and half of the maximum number of cruise intervals and downhill strides done in week 10. In week 12 run a basic tempo run of 15 to 20 minutes early in the week and otherwise keep everything short and easy.

Testing Progress

   Recall that every third or fourth week, depending on how long your periods are, is a rest week culminating in a test of progress. One of the best

tests is to run a race of less than 10 kilometers. Another test which I've found to be an excellent gauge of progress is eight to 12 x 800 meters run as fast as you can with 20-second walking recoveries. As your hoped-for marathon fitness improves so should your average time for this workout.

The average time may also provide a ballpark prediction of how fast you can go in the race. For example, if your average was three minutes and 10 seconds expect to run about three hours and 10 minutes for the marathon. It's uncanny how closely this workout predicts race time.

The Race

When you get to the starting line you should be ready for a fast marathon based on three-part pacing. Forget about going out hard to "build a cushion." Running fast early in the race will only cause you to crash and burn later on. Be patient and have confidence in all of the hard training you did over the last 12 weeks. It will pay off.

Sidebars

3-Part Pacing

Goal Time	Avg Pace	Miles 1-3	Miles 4-20	Miles 21-26.2
4:00	9:10	9:25	8:59	9:28
3:55	8:58	9:13	8:48	9:16
3:50	8:47	9:01	8:37	9:04
3:45	8:35	8:49	8:25	8:52
3:40	8:24	8:38	8:14	8:41
3:35	8:12	8:25	8:03	8:28
3:30	8:01	8:14	7:52	8:17
3:25	7:49	8:02	7:40	8:04
3:20	7:38	7:51	7:29	7:53
3:15	7:27	7:39	7:18	7:42

3:10	7:15	7:27	7:07	7:29
3:05	7:04	7:16	6:56	7:18
3:00	6:52	7:03	6:44	7:06
2:55	6:41	6:52	6:33	6:54
2:50	6:29	6:40	6:22	6:42
2:45	6:18	6:28	6:11	6:30
2:40	6:06	6:16	5:59	6:18
2:35	5:55	6:05	5:48	6:07
2:30	5:44	5:53	5:37	5:55

Mile Repeats

Goal Time	Build to x Reps	Pace
4:00+	5-6	8:50
3:55	5-6	8:40
3:50	5-6	8:25
3:45	6-7	8:15
3:40	6-7	8:00
3:35	7-8	7:50
3:30	7-8	7:40
3:25	8-9	7:30
3:20	8-9	7:20
3:15	8-10	7:10
3:10	8-10	6:55
3:05	9-11	6:45
3:00	9-11	6:35
2:55	9-12	6:20
2:50	10-12	6:10
2:45	10-13	6:00
2:40	10-13	5:45
2:35	10-13	5:35
2:30	10-13	5:25