

# Speed Training for Marathon Runners

By Fred Klinge

Maybe “speed” training is not the best title for this particular article! For most of us, the marathon is a race of “stamina” and “strength”. Running your fastest marathon effort means careful preparation and a systematic approach to establishing a realistic race pace that can be held over the 26.2 mile distance.

First and foremost, this discussion is aimed towards runners that have an established training base of at least two to three years of consistent running (approximately 20-40 miles per week). Being successful at the marathon distance is a lot like building a house – a strong foundation is the first phase of the building process. Please note the approach I am describing here is one culled from my own racing experience. There are many viable approaches to marathon speed training and this is just one.

Reflecting back on my own racing career, I feel the marathon is very different kind of foot race. Preparing to run a fast marathon effort means foregoing faster times at the shorter distances. Part of a marathoner’s preparation is emotional - coming to peace with the fact that shorter race times will most likely be slower than normal.

The marathon is race of rhythm, finding a groove and comfortably holding it as long as possible. Our goal is to train as much as possible, stay uninjured, and develop a faster pace per mile over the marathon distance.

One workout in particular was extremely effective over the course of my competitive marathon career. It is simple and relatively safe. I performed this workout once a week, starting about 12 weeks before the marathon and ending two weeks before race day. For this workout to be most effective, it needs to be done on a track. One of the most important facets of this workout is developing a sense of rhythm – knowing how the target race pace will feel when race days rolls around.

Here is the basic workout structure:

- Easy two mile warm up
- 2 x 2 mile pickups with a very easy mile jog in between pickups. The 2 mile pickups should be done at a pace 10-15 seconds per mile faster than your target marathon race pace. E.g., if you are hoping to run a three hour marathon, your target race pace will be about 8 minutes per mile – your 2 mile pickup should be run in 15:30 to 15:40 (7:45 to 7:50 per mile) with heavy emphasis on consistent lap splits. You don’t want a lot of variance in the lap splits or the mile splits. Remember...steady rhythm!
- Easy two to three mile warm down.

Please notice that the total mileage of this workout is 9 to 10 miles, so make sure the preceding and following training days are easy, shorter distance efforts. Rest is an important component of training.

In the overall weekly scheme of training, I focused on three important workouts....the traditional weekend long run (15-20 miles), the above 2 x 2 mile track workout, and an intermediate long run

(12-13 miles). Everything else was easy foundation mileage. Avoid junk miles (short runs just for the sake of piling up mileage) and strive to run as much mileage as possible on the fewest number of workouts.

Pushing the envelope with marathon training also increases the risk of injury. I'm a big believer in incorporating resistance training into your marathon preparation program. Two to three strength training workouts each week will help maintain muscle balance and improve orthopedic range of motion.

Good luck with your training and always keep in mind that your long-range health and fitness is what really counts.

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