

Planning your running year

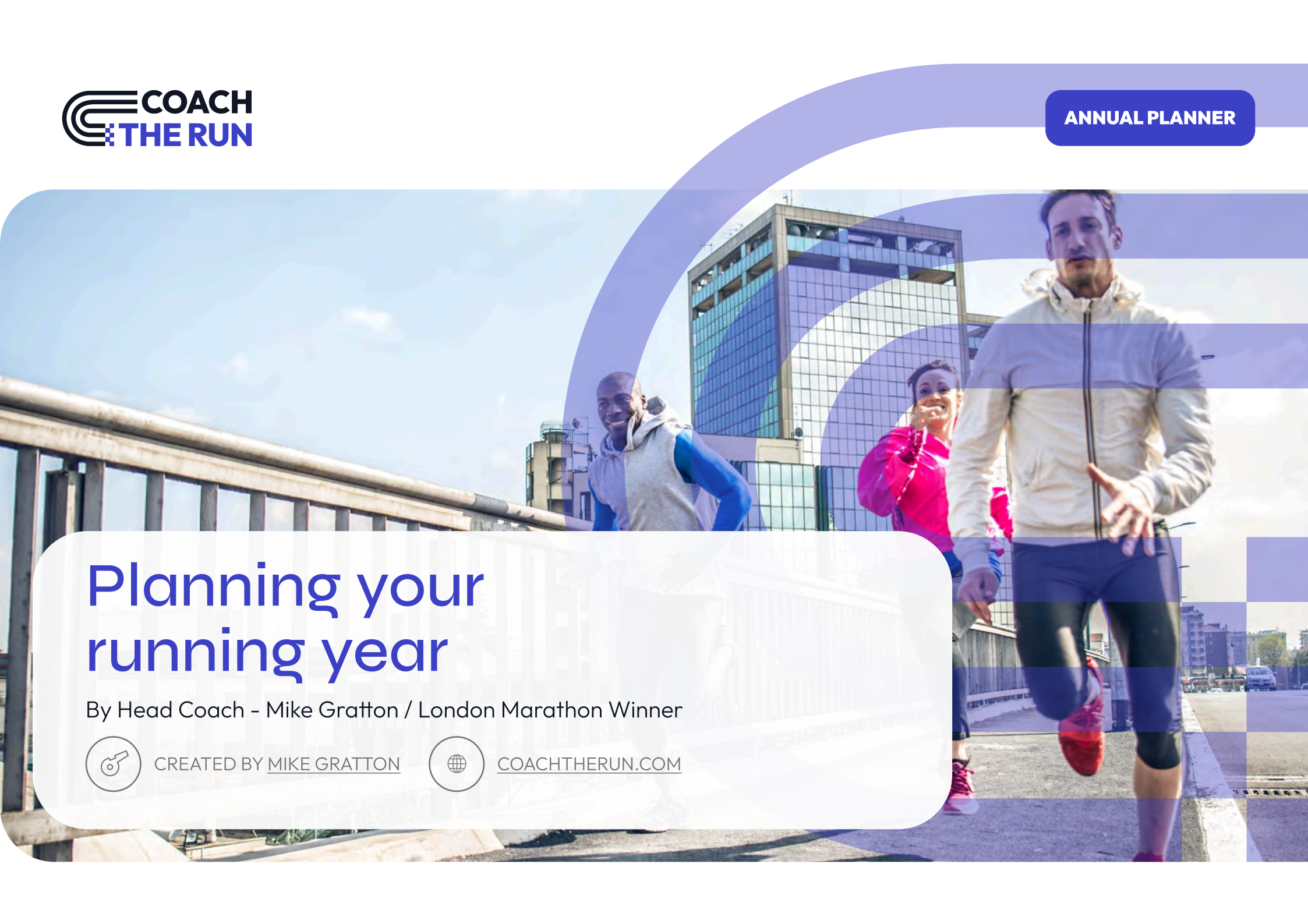
By Head Coach - Mike Gratton / London Marathon Winner



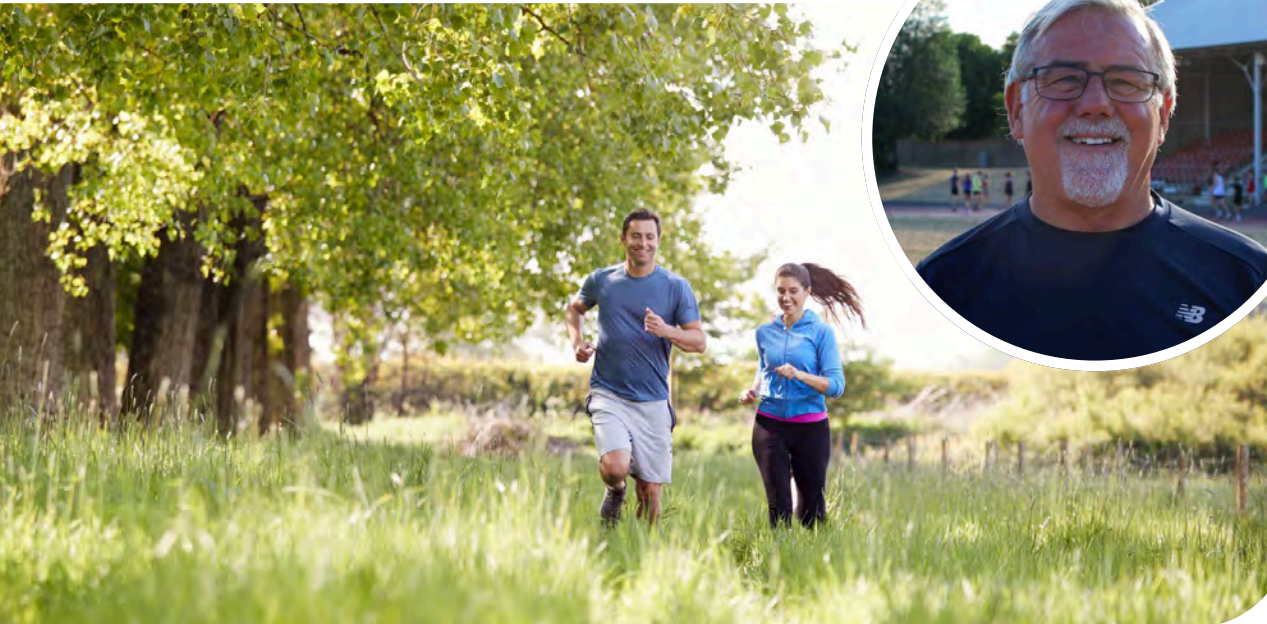
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January is the time we all make resolutions, and for runners, this may be to get out training more, be healthier, and go to club night more often



The problem with open-ended statements is that they quickly get forgotten, certainly if the weather turns nasty.

I have always found it better to have firmer objectives; this might be a specific target time or a particular race, that you can commit to training towards.

Planning your year around key races

I have also found it useful to have a plan for the entire year so that you don't get to your target race, let's say an April marathon, then lapse into the doldrums afterwards with the post-marathon blues.

For my personal year, I would think firstly about targets. The event to target could be determined by how it fits the pattern of the seasons (winter, spring, summer, autumn) and the key races in those seasons.

The UK running season tends to follow the weather seasons.
Winter: Cross country and trail;
Spring: half and full marathon; **Early-summer:** 5km or 10km flat road races or trail races; **Summer:** track or ultra trails; **Autumn:** half and full marathon.

However, now, there's an enormous number of events available every week throughout the year, from parkrun to race series in venues such as Dorney Lake, Battersea Park and Goodwood circuit (in the south) and similar throughout the country. Thus, there is a danger that the improvement graph we may hanker after flatlines, and you end up churning out the same times week in, week out – there's no focus.

The seasonality of the traditional running year allows highs and lows, which usually means that the highs can be targeted, and they can be higher 'highs' than they may otherwise be.

If I look at the best period of planning of my personal career, which, admittedly, goes back a few years, I can see notes in my diary of how I planned out how I was going to reach my targets.





Chasing the next level:

In 1981 I finished 3rd in the National Marathon Champs with 2hr 16mins. This was a few weeks before the first London Marathon. Having watched London, I thought, “Right, I want a piece of that”, and planned how to make it to the next level.

Taken from my notes :

1981 November/December:
Increase mileage and build a base.

1982 January/February:
continue long runs, build in fartlek and hills.

March run a 20mile race at 2.12 pace.

April, run 2.12 in the London Marathon.

I did it – reaching all my aims!

I knew, depending on the result at London, I was aiming at a late summer city marathon or selection for England at the Commonwealth Games. Either way, I was planning a September or October marathon. As it happened, I finished 3rd in London in 2.12.30 and got chosen by England for the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane.

As the Commonwealth Games was in Australia, and there wouldn't be an opportunity to do races in the month before the games, I planned a period of high mileage through the summer and a period of lower mileage with increased racing just before going to Brisbane.

This worked well. I finished 6th in the UK 10,000m track champs in Cardiff, then went on to two weeks of very high mileage training in Corfu (which had the same sort of climate to Brisbane), then ran 5 races, back-to-back, including a personal best for 3,000m on the track of 8mins just before going to Brisbane.

From bronze to victory

In the Commonwealth Games, at the end, I took the bronze medal in a PB of 2.12.06.

It was a hilly race, and I finished strongly to move from 7th to 3rd in the last 6 miles, so I thought a sub 2.10 was on the cards – at London 1983.

I had a clear plan (from the pattern of 1982). Lots of base miles in November and December, long runs of 20 to 22 miles every Sunday from November to April, hills and fartlek in January and February, March, a long race (this time Rome to Ostia 28km race in Italy where I finished a close 2nd), then faster road races, in March into April, including PB's with a 13.35min 5km relay leg, and a 47.11 10mile race.

Notably, in January, I finished 5th in the Kent cross country champs, well off the pace; then, in February, I ran a 48.30 10-mile race, but then in March, a 47.11 10-mile race. I was progressing from a relatively low-performance point to the highest 'high' and winning London 1983 in 2.09.43.

As a coach these days, I plan for my runners in the same way. This has helped a lot of runners who have got stuck at a level of performance but who wanted to move on to a new target.

My first action is to look at a 12 month or more plan with them, as it takes up to a couple of years of progressive training load, in stepping-stone blocks, to reach a new level.

“Your body will adapt and get stronger with each next block. But for improvement to come, there needs to be recovery from the last peak that allows the mind and body to prepare for the next block.”

Head Coach @ Coach the Run -
Mike Gratton, winning the London
Marathon in 1983 with 2hrs 9mins



How strategic training plans lead to personal bests in marathon running

Let's take a look at some recent success stories from my running clients:

Stephen was stuck at 2.24 for the marathon. We planned London 2023 with a big mileage base from December, progressively running faster in the months after the New Year, a January Half Marathon was planned to see how it was going (69mins at Farnborough), then another in March to see progress (pb 67 min in Fleet Half Marathon). This was followed by 8 weeks of 10km and then 5km pace training, with progressively faster long runs. The result a pb of 2.20 in London.

Injury affected the following summer's racing, so we returned to base training, commencing in November 2023 for the 2024 London Marathon.

2024 saw the same progression through the Spring: 69 min in the Farnborough Half Marathon, a pb 66 min in the Fleet Half Marathon, then a pb huge 2.19 in London.

This time, a rest after London, then a build-up with plenty of 10km pace training and racing, using the warmer summer season to gain pace, off the winter base period, led to further improvements with a pb half at Surrey, winning in 65mins, and another pb with 2.19.06 in Berlin in September.



Smart training cycles: How planning and recovery lead to running success



Similarly, Richard had run 2.38 in London in 2023. I looked at his training and felt he was running his long runs too fast. In the winter, we slowed it all down, and this helped build more volume without fatigue. He went on to run an 8-minute pb in London in 2024 of 2.30.10!

The following summer Richard concentrated a bit more on 10km training and racing before building up endurance again to the Frankfurt Marathon in October. He improved again to 2.27.

We continue to plan. In the early autumn Richard ran 5km and 10km personal bests in the post-marathon period, on reduced mileage. In December and January he is back to winter base training for London. Then we aim at different targets in the summer of shorter races, before building to the Valencia Marathon in December.

These examples are of faster runners, but the benefits of planning a year and having recovery, physical and mental, followed by periods of building back, works for all runners; it allows any runner to have a down period, recovery and adaptation, then from an enhanced state, a build-up to new levels.

Your body will adapt and get stronger with each next block. But for improvement, there needs to be recovery from the last peak that allows the mind and body to prepare for the next block.

How might a year plan look

The full year plan can be very simple – just outlining the key events for you:

December - January	Base aerobic training	Cross Country races
February	Base aerobic Strength – Hills, Fartlek	Half Marathon
March	Progressive pace long runs Threshold, VO2 Intervals	Half Marathon
April	Progressive pace long runs Threshold, VO2 Intervals	Marathon
May	Recovery + easy running	parkruns
June	Medium long runs VO2 Intervals	parkruns 10km PB attempt
July	Long runs – 2 to 2.30hrs, Threshold	-
August	Long runs – 2 to 2.30hrs Threshold, VO2 Intervals	10km race
September	Progressive pace long runs, Threshold, VO2 Intervals	10km race Half marathon
October	Taper & recovery runs	Marathon
November	Base Aerobic running	-
December	Aerobic	Cross Country races

Outline key sessions

Once you have a broad idea of what your priorities are, you can plan a block in a bit more detail, outlining the key session types:

WEEK STARTING	Long Run	Medium Steady	Tempo	Intervals	Races
25-Nov	15 miles	10 miles	Hilly threshold	Fartlek	-
02-Dec	15 miles	10 miles	Hilly threshold	Fartlek	-
09-Dec	18 miles	10 miles	Hilly threshold	Fartlek	-
16-Dec	18 miles	10 miles	Hilly threshold	Fartlek	-
23-Dec	10 miles	10 miles	Race	Hill repeats	parkrun
30-Dec	18 miles	10 miles	Race	Hill repeats	Hants xc champs
06-Jan	18 miles	13 miles	Threshold repeats	Hill repeats	Hants xc league
13-Jan	Race	8 miles	Threshold repeats	Hill repeats	-
20-Jan	18 miles	13 miles	Threshold repeats	Hill repeats	-
27-Jan	Race	8 miles	Race	Strides	Chichester 10km
03-Feb	Race	8 miles	Race	Strides	Farnborough Half
10-Feb	20 miles	13 miles	Mile repeats or similar	400m intervals x 16, or similar	-
17-Feb	20 miles	13 miles	Mile repeats or similar	400m intervals x 16, or similar	-
24-Feb	20 miles	13 miles	Mile repeats or similar	400m intervals x 16, or similar	parkrun
03-Mar	Race	8 miles	Mile repeats or similar	Strides	Bushy Park 10km
10-Mar	18 miles progressive pace	10 tempo	Mile repeats or similar	Pyramids, 200, 400, 600, 800, 600, 400, 200	-
17-Mar	Race	8 tempo	Mixed pace/distance	Strides	Eastley 10km

Add more detail

And then a bit more detail on a weekly basis, with the schedule tweaked on an ongoing basis based on real time feedback:



30 DEC

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
10 miles steady	am 5 miles steady pm warm up 2 miles, 15 x 60 sec hill reps, jog down recovery	10 miles steady	am 5 miles easy pm 10mins warm-up: 30mins hilly tempo	8 miles steady	Parkrun + 5 miles	18 miles steady

6 JAN

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
5 miles easy recovery run	am 5 miles steady pm warm up 2 miles, 15 x 60 sec hill reps, jog down recovery	10 miles steady	am 5 miles easy pm 10mins warm-up: 30mins hilly tempo	8 miles steady	Hants xc champs	18 miles steady

13 JAN

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
5 miles easy recovery run	am 5 miles easy pm warm up: 3 x 15min @ 10km pace, 3 min rec	8 miles steady	am 5 miles easy pm 10mins warm-up: alternate 16 x 60sec @ 5km pace, 60 sec float	5 miles steady	Hants xc league	18 miles steady

Why weekly training matters more than races

At some points, weekly training is more important than races. Although races are important in your mind, they effectively become part of the training for the ultimate goal.

I think back to finishing 5th in the Kent Country cross-country at a time when I was one of the top 10 marathon runners in the world. Between getting bronze in the Commonwealth Games and winning the London Marathon, I was only 5th in Kent! I would make the point that the Kent cross country was after the games and a rest period - and in the early part of my London build-up.

I was disappointed at the time but ultimately didn't care. Other than the 4 runners who beat me in the Kents, nobody remembers that low point of the season; they do remember that I won the London Marathon the following April!

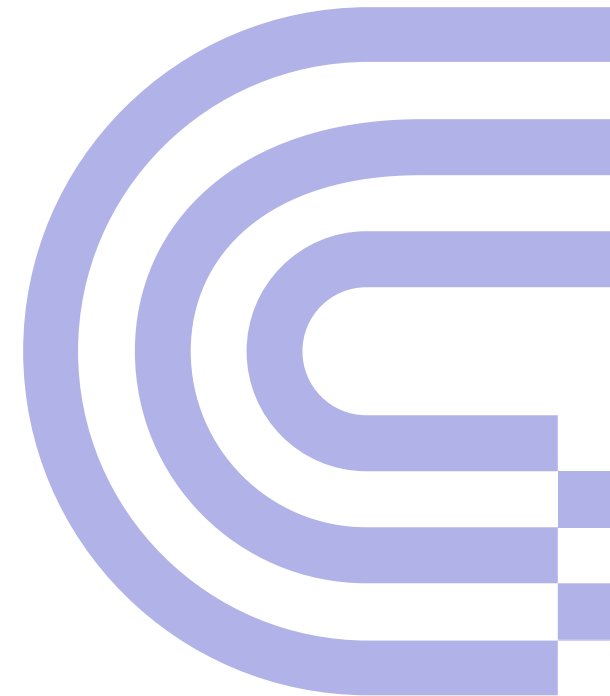
Don't flatline and become frustrated by staleness and stagnation - plan well ahead and look at different targets in different periods.

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Your sessions

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WEEK STARTING	Long Run	Medium Steady	Tempo	Intervals	Races

Month...



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MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN

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MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN

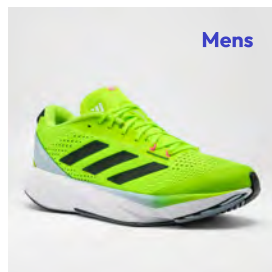
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MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN

Running gear

Below is a selection of our recommended running gear for your training block.
Buy on Decathlon today...

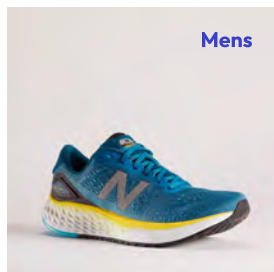
DECATHLON



Mens

ADIDAS ADIZERO SL

From £109
<https://tidd.ly/3sdMno7>



Mens

New Balance Fresh Foam

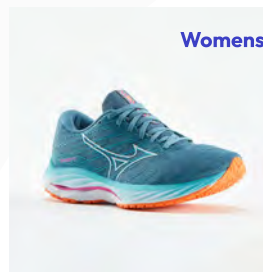
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Womens

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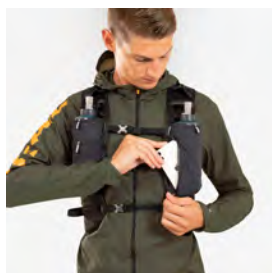
Massage Gun

From £59
<https://tidd.ly/3QBA1Q7>



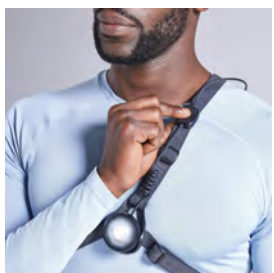
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[instagram.com/_coachtherun](https://www.instagram.com/_coachtherun)



Good luck!

Do you have feedback?
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