Training Strategy

As more runners desire to be able run ultramarathon distance, they frequently ask if there is a training plan available to help them achieve that goal. Very structured training plans are available on the Internet that seem to feed the appetite of those who seek a prescriptive plan to achieve their goal.

I have never subscribed to such an approach, using somebody's chart telling me what I "have to run" in order to prepare for a race. I consider such approaches silly. It can lead to both injury and burn-out. I'm shocked when I read this advise in a typical training program: "If you need them, take recovery days." Of course you need recovery days! My approach to training is pretty simple. At the beginning of the week, I set a goal for how many miles I would like to run that week. It will vary depending if I'm recovering from a recent long race or adventure run, or if I'm starting to taper a bit for the next race. In general I'll build up the weekly miles between races and then decrease at least a week or two before the next race.

As far as training each day during the week, I believe it is foolish to map out exactly what I should run each day. Instead, I listen to my body. If I need rest on a particular day, I rest. Weather will often dictate things. A busy life will often dictate my schedule. But in the end, if I come close to my mile-goal for the week I'm stratified. I chuckle as I hear people say, "I'm supposed to run ten miles today," as if they don't, that their training will be totally off.

"To make sure you'll keep up a good pace, I'm going to release Spike here 1 minute after you start."

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	Short - 3mile	Short - 4mile Strength	Fartlek - 3mile	Short - 3mile Strength	Short - 4mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 10mile
2	Short - 3mile	Short - 5mile Strength	Interval 2 x 1600m	Short - 3mile Strength	Short - 5mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 12mile
3	Short - 3mile	Short - 6mile Strength	Hill - 3mile	Short - 3mile Strength	Short - 6mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 13mile
4	Short - 3mile	Short - 6mile Strength	Fartlek - 4mile	Short - 3mile Strength	Short - 6mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 12mile
5	Short - 3mile	Short - 6mile Strength	Interval 4 x 800m	Short - 3mile Strength	Short - 7mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 14mile
6	Short - 3mile	Short - 6mile Strength	Hill - 4mile	Short - 3mile Strength	Short - 5mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 10mile
7	Short - 3mile	Short - 7mile Strength	Fartlek - 4mile	Short - 4mile	Short - 7mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 16mile
8	Short - 3mile	Short - 7mile	Interval 6 x 800m	Short - 4mile	Short - 8mile	Rest	Long - 18mile
9	Short - 3mile	Short - 5mile	Short - 3mile	Short - 3mile Strength	Short - 9mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 12mile
10	Short - 4mile	Short - 8mile Strength	Fartlek - 5mile	Short - 4mile	Short - 8mile	Rest	Long - 20mile
11	Short - 3mile	Short - 8mile	Interval 7 x 800m	Short - 4mile Strength	Short - 10mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 10mile
12	Short - 4mile	Short - 8mile Strength	Hill - 5mile	Short - 5mile	Short - 8mile	Rest	Long - 20mile
13	Short - 3mile	Short - 6mile	Short - 4mile	Short - 5mile Strength	Short - 10mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 12mile
14	Short - 5mile	Short - 9mile Strength	Interval 8 x 800m	Short - 4mile	Short - 7mile	Rest	Long - 22mile
15	Short - 4mile	Short - 7mile	Hill - 6mile	Short - 4mile Strength	Short - 5mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 12mile
16	Short - 4mile	Short - 6mile Strength	Fartlek - 5mile	Short - 3mile	Short - 4mile Race pace	Rest	Long - 10mile
17	Short - 3mile	Short - 5mile Strength	Hill - 4mile	Rest	Short - 4mile	Rest	Long - 8mile
18	Short - 3mile	Short - 4mile	Rest	short - 2mile	Rest	Rest	Race

Marathon Training Schedule - Advanced

Charts like this make me laugh

I never train on Sundays so that always makes sure I have a needed day of rest. I'm frequently asked if I run every day. During 2010, one of my highest mileage years, and also one of my most successful racing years, I averaged running 3.5 days per week, running 3,400 miles that year. In 2013 I concentrated on running very long runs on Saturdays. During that year I ran 3,200 miles and averaged running only 2.5 days per week. Those who believe in those daily running charts are skeptical. But I point to the results at how many ultras I have run, many placing very well despite my age.

Some ultra "coaches" insist that to be successful in running ultras that you must add long back-to-back runs. This is the practice of running two long runs (25+) on two consecutive days. Those who promote these insist that the value is getting time on your feet and stressing your body to perform even when you are tired. Perhaps these have value, but I have never included them in my training so don't believe those

who claim this practice is a "must." Again, I would rather listen to my body, recover when needed and try to avoid injury. Instead I will strive to do a long run about once per week.

What about tapering? Certainly there is value in tapering your miles off before an event, but I have seen inconsistent results when I taper very much. To me, life is short. I would rather be running. In 2013, with all those frequent long runs, I discovered that I started to recover faster and faster between them as my body became more accustomed to running them frequently. Thus I believe my need for tapering was less. I had some good performances in 2013 even though my rest between 100s were at times just a week or two.

I continued this practice in 2015 and ran at least a 50K run 40 of the 52 weeks that year. In 2015 with this solid mileage base I finished two 100-milers with just five days rest in between. In 2015, I ran 4,564 miles.
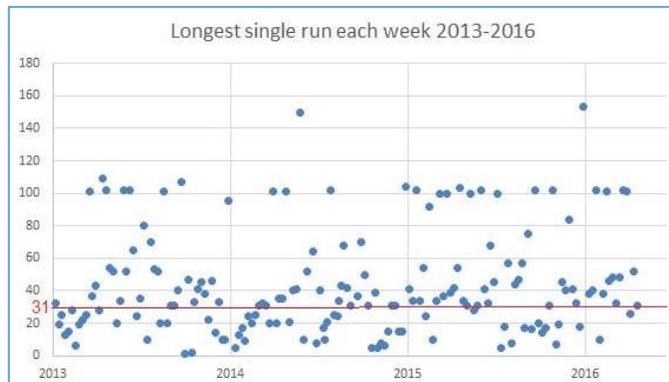
Is stretching part of my training regimen? For me no, unless it is before and after a tempo or speed training that tends to tighten up the muscles. I would rather get running than spend a bunch of time stretching. I find that after running a few miles, I'm warmed up nicely. For me muscle strains have been very, very few. In 2013 early in the year I pulled my hamstring and it did affect me for a year, but that happened running a silly 20-minute 5K. I should act my age and not try to run that fast anymore.
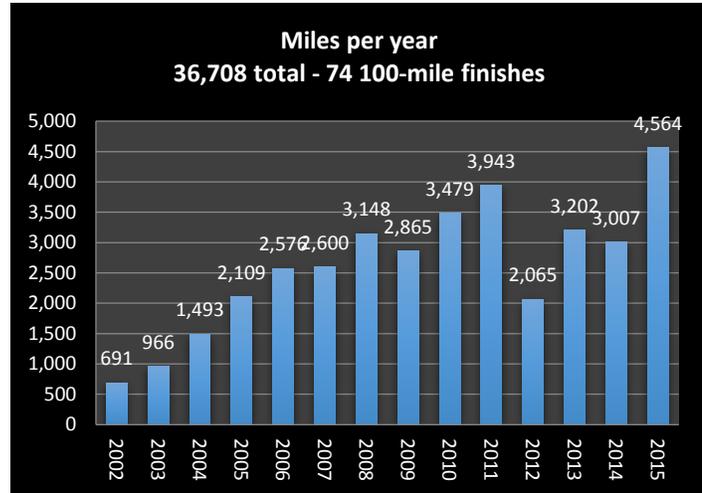

My 2012 training

In 2012 I had a serious stress-fracture injury. No, it was not due to improper training, or too much training. It was due to running with improper shoes and a pronation problem. Stress on the medial side of my leg eventually started a fracture. Then, not understanding the injury, I raced and finished a 100 during which it continued to fracture it further. A poor decision that caused me to stop running for months.

Without running for all those months, what did it take for me to again finish a 100-miler? I once had fun mocking the structured, prescriptive training programs and charted two such plans against what I actually did to successfully train for a Cascade Crest 100 finish.

Week 25 I successfully finished Cascade Crest 100. A month later I also finished Bear 100. I think this illustrates a couple important points. First, no you don't have to follow those formal training plans and can still succeed. Second, once you build up a good mileage base, even taking 15 weeks off doesn't mean that you have to start back at square one.

I run for the love of it. I have more fun training than racing. If training starts becoming boring, I always seek ways to make it interesting by doing "crazy" new things like running across a frozen lake, running a marathon before work, finding new trails, or accomplishing something no one else has tried doing such as running all the way around Utah Lake. Mixing it up is very important. I very, very rarely run a same trail or route on consecutive days. I watch local road runners, running the same route each morning on the shoulders of a busy highway and shake my head with wonder. They usually don't have a smile on their face. I now rarely run up Mount Timpanogos anymore after accomplishing 79 summits. The reason I don't, is that because I have run it so many times, I have every turn and almost every large rock memorized. It has become generally boring and not the best use of my training.

Miles per year
36,708 total - 74 100-mile finishes

Year	Miles
2002	691
2003	966
2004	1,493
2005	2,109
2006	2,572
2007	2,600
2008	3,148
2009	2,865
2010	3,479
2011	3,943
2012	2,065
2013	3,202
2014	3,007
2015	4,564

Training on a similar terrain as an upcoming race is very important. During the winter and early spring, most of my races are on flat trails or dirt roads. Thus my training during those months are on similar trails. During the summer months I shift to steeper mountain training. I usually know exactly what the next race terrain will include and I seek similar trails at a similar altitude.

Heat training can be very important to get ready for hotter races. I now just avoid hot races because what they do to my system. But if I am going to run a race that will be 80 degrees or above, I need to do some heat training. I do not believe that this takes many weeks. My experience has been that the body can adapt with heat training in just a couple weeks if it is consistent. No, I don't train in a sauna, but I have exercised in a hot tub, getting the heart rate up, and that seems to help. I've also driven around with the heat on in the car when it is very hot out. These silly things have made a difference.

Altitude training can be very important for higher altitude races. But again, I've seen good results with just 2-3 weeks of consistent altitude training. My best Leadville 100 finish was accomplished by backpacking for four days before the race staying above 10,000 feet. The week before that I also would sleep in the mountains at 11,000 feet several times and then head into work.

To increase my speed, periodic tempo runs are critical but also risky. They significantly help increase foot speed and also get me used to running with a higher heart rate. But the risk at my age is muscle or further bone injury. They can be painful but I wish I could do more of them.

I look back fondly on my training over the years. Eventually I'll probably give up the races, but I hope I can keep doing the training.