

Treadmill Training



You would probably expect that trail ultrarunners avoid treadmills like the plague. Yes, I have been known to refer to running on them as wimpy, when I could be running outside. I called that machine the “dreadmill” or the “hamster machine.” I watch shows like *Biggest Loser* and yell at the people on the television telling them to go outside, to get out of the stupid fitness rooms.

In my housing development we have a small fitness room and a 25-meter pool that I have access to. It opens daily at 4:30 a.m. When the sun is up, out the window as I run I can see beautiful Utah Lake and the snow covered Wasatch Mountains. I have a few friends who have worked out there year-round in the morning for the past ten years. I usually only see them there during the “winter” months when the trails start turning muddy and the mornings become very cold. I make my appearance in November and bid good-bye in May.



I still run plenty in the outdoors during the winter months, but the crazy treadmill helps me continue my training even during long periods of bad weather or poor winter air quality. Since 2003, I have never taken a winter off from training. Some years, I have my highest mileage months during the winter. This helps to be in top form for the early spring races.



I looked back and added up all my treadmill miles 2005-2013 and was surprised to see that I had run nearly 4,000 miles on that hideous machine, or about 15% of my running miles during that time. By 2009, I started to notice that with effective treadmill workouts, my race performance improved significantly. I started to set personal records at every distance from 5K to 100 miles.

- 5K - 19:51 – 2010
- 10K – 42:04 – 2010
- 1/2 Marathon: 1:29:13 – 2011
- Marathon – 3:23:43 – 2010
- 50K - 4:38 – 2010
- 50-mile – 8:07 – 2010
- 100K - 10:49 – 2010
- 12-hours 67.1 miles – 2010
- 100-mile 19:40 – 2011
- 24-hours 117.8 miles – 2011
- 48-hours 187.033 miles – 2010



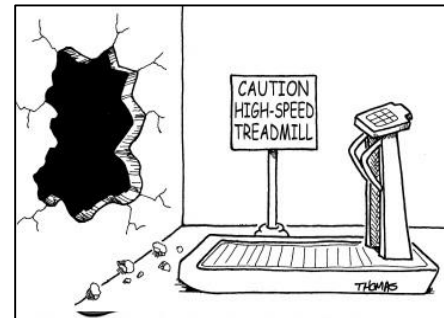
In 2015, I finally bought a nice incline treadmill and put it in my basement. It had been increasingly hard to get out and run the nearby trails in the morning that now bore me. Going to the clubhouse was becoming a pain because machines were often broken and people would give me disappointed looks when they came in and I was on “their machine.” So now, with my own convenient machine I can really pile up the miles. I have a nice setup to watch TV, Netflix, YouTube, etc. Instead of sitting on a couch to watch a ball game, I can run while I watch it.

The benefits I see from treadmill workouts include:

- Using a controlled soft-surface running environment when overcoming injury. I use the treadmill to ease back into running. Also, with the reflection off the dark windows in the morning, I can observe my running form and test out shoes to see how they affect my pronation issues.

- An effective way to increase my foot speed. If I only train on tough trails my foot speed declines. I’m leery about running on pavement, especially because of recent stress fractures, so the treadmill is the place where I can push the pace up to 6:00 miles at times.

- A great facilitator in doing tempo and speed runs. As I introduced some long but speedy runs into my training, it helped me finally achieve that sub-20-hour 100-miler, even at my advanced age of more than 50-years old. I’ve done a 40:00 10K with a treadmill pulling me along.



- A torture machine to do incline training. We have a great incline treadmill that I will really crank up to steep angles. My steep workouts are pretty legendary at the room and I always get comments or people mention to my wife about the crazy things I do with the treadmill. The term “nuts” is always included in the description.

- Mental training. Hey, if you can run a marathon on a treadmill, you can practically do anything.

- Power walking training. During 100s when I walk, my pace tends to be too slow. But if I have recently used the treadmill to force me to powerwalk faster, I find that I do much better in a race.

- Heat training. To me, 70 degrees is hot while running. Treadmill running in the warm room helps me prepare for a hotter race.

My workouts will vary depending on what I’m training for. If I have an upcoming fixed-time race that will involve continues miles on a flat surface, I will do plenty of long, mostly flat, workouts. As spring approaches, I shift to develop my hill strength and start cranking up the incline and slowing the speed.

I find that my mind can tolerate the treadmill much easier if it is done the first thing in the morning when I’m still sleepy. If I’m alone at the fitness room, sometimes I will even run with the lights out. I never have an issue with holding on to the front of the treadmill. I prefer that so I can close my eyes, keep my balance, be able to look away, and don’t have to focus on not falling off the machine. Yes, that makes it easier, but I simply offset it by increasing the speed or the incline. I usually use a towel to cover up the indicators on the machine. Watching those crazy numbers click by makes the mental challenge even tougher. Also having a towel handy is great when the sweat flies. I usually listen to sports radio in the morning as I run and then shift to music when that gets boring.



An example of a typical workout is what I call 10x10x10. Ten miles, at 10:00 pace, at 10% incline. That is 100 minutes of good torture. The incline machine I use estimates the number of feet

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climbed. During a 12X10X10 the machine thought I climbed 6,400 feet and burned 2,500 calories. During some very long workouts I have been able to turn over the dial, climbing more than 10,000 feet.

In 2010 as I was training for Rocky Raccoon 100, I decided to run 20 miles on the machine, the same distance as one loop at Rocky. I ran the first 16 miles at marathon pace and then backed off and threw in some inclines. I finished it in 2:45. The guy who was cleaning the rec center came back into the room and asked, “You still here? How far are you going?” I replied that I didn’t know but had gone 16 miles so far. I then heard gasps from a couple other people in the room.

A week later I continued the mental torture by running 28 miles. I would see groups of people come and go all morning, but I was still running. I hit the marathon mark at 3:40 and then cooled down from there. Four hours on the crazy machine. I ran my fastest of my five Rocky Raccoon finishes that year, in 21:07.

During November, 2010, I ran my first 50K on the treadmill. Six groups of people came and went during my run. I brought a little drop bag with things in just as if I was running a real 50K. I reached the marathon distance at 3:37 and 50K at 4:16. That was pretty speedy. Using my treadmill shorthand, it was a 31x8.5x1

During November, 2011, was my highest treadmill week. I ran a total of 75 miles on it. Including the previous Saturday, I ran 109 miles on the treadmill in eight days.

I ran what was my longest treadmill run to date in November, 2013. I was on the machine for five hours and ran 34 miles. I hit the 50K mark at 4:31. It was good workout because I added in plenty of hills along the way. The machine thought I climbed more than 10,000 feet, but I think 5,000 feet was more realistic. After five hours I just couldn’t handle it anymore. My mind was going numb. I went out into the cold rain and ran a few more miles to bring some sanity back. In 2016 I ran 38 miles on the treadmill one day.



This shows the track of my 34-mile run.

I have to admit, that one of the few amusements to do while on the treadmill is to observe other people’s workouts. Here is a list of some of my favorites and the names I’ve given these people. (Hopefully no offense, all in fun):

- “Hand talker” This is a lady who would walk on the treadmill and yak very loudly to her mother the entire time. It was fascinating to watch her hand gestures while on the treadmill. They were sweeping and amazing. When she was on the machine next to me, I feared that she was going to eventually slap me. She would also slap her hands together hard while talking for emphasis. I was impressed how she could do that while walking fast.

- “Heart rate checker” One guy would come in pretty consistently, but only for about 15 minutes. He would run fast on the treadmill for about 30 seconds, have the machine check his heart rate and then walked for a couple minutes. Then he would repeat that a few times. He did all of this with the fan blasting on him (and me). He even had a water bottle with him and took frequent drinks. I’m not sure what he accomplished. He would leave after those 15 minutes without any sweat. Well, at least he’s doing something.



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- “Slow walking weight lifter” This guy would do a few simple reps with the weights and then walk around very slowly for five minutes, take a drink, look at himself in the mirror and then slowly set up the next easy exercise. During his 40 minutes there I once timed him. He only was actually working for about seven minutes. No sweat, no pain, no work.

“Weights watcher” This guy would actually would stand and stare at the weight machines for long minutes, doing nothing else. I guess by just looking at the weights he thought he was working.

- “Sweatshirt Lady” This lady would come in, get on the treadmill, and then take off her hoody and tie it around her waist like she is going for a hike in the woods. (There are plenty of hangers nearby for coats.) I guess she puts it there in case it suddenly gets cold in the room and she might need it? She has to do her ten minute treadmill walk with a fan blowing full speed on her (and me). I just can’t understand people who do anything to avoid the littlest amount of sweat.



- “Stretch Guy” This guy would come in, spent more than ten minutes stretching out his legs and then did five minutes on the elliptical at its easiest level. Then more stretching followed by five minutes of slow jogging on the treadmill. No sweating was at all involved. (I never stretch. I think it just wastes time when I could be running.)

- “Cardio Lady” This lady would work very hard. She was only about 100 pounds and would do a tough 90-minute cardio workout each day on the elliptical and incline treadmill. She would weigh herself before and after every workout.

- “Foot slappers” Frequently someone runs next to me who has terrible running form and slaps their feet very hard, doing hard heel strikes. I’m so tempted to offer advice and help them do more mid-foot striking, but I never have the nerve. I’m just a sweaty old man. One girl even does some barefoot running. You would think that would help improve the form. Not in this case. Her heel strikes are so hard and loud that I have to push the ear phones in deeper and turn up the tunes louder.

- “Twitter Lifter” This guy cracked me up. He was obviously addicted to his iPhone. He would do a set for a minute or two and then his hand would quickly go into his pocket, pull out his phone and then he would read and text for a few minutes. Perhaps he had an app he was using to record his workout but I highly doubt it. I looked like he was on Twitter. He would do this over and over and over again.

- “Girl band walkers” Instead of using ear phones, these ladies would actually bring in speakers for their iPod and play the same sort of pounding girl-band music that everyone had to listen to. They never asked permission from anyone, and would do it even if the TV was on.

- “A.D.D Ladies” These two ladies had Attention Deficit Disorder for their exercise routine. They would go from one exercise to another, circling the room. The problem was, they would only spend a couple minutes with each machine, elliptical, treadmill, etc. at low intensity. Their routine was impossible to get the heart rate up. They would quit a machine so early, rest, and then go to another. It got me dizzy watching them.



“I did a 30-minute workout today: 15 minutes looking for my sneakers, 10 minutes looking for my sweat pants and 5 minutes on the treadmill.”

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- “New Years’ Crowd” A few days after New Years’ Day, just like clockwork, new people would appear in the fitness room. It tends to get crowded, but 90% of them last only about two weeks.
- “Grunting old man” This guy is always using the machine I want, stays on it for hours, grunts and groans, and drips sweat all over. He runs so long and far that he even needs to change shirts. Oh! That’s me.



Oh, the silly things that can entertain you as you run on such a boring machine! All these people are doing some good. I’m glad to see the room used. My buddies who are there year round work very, very hard, mostly weight-lifting. They give me a hard time about my workouts. They joke about them to everyone. On Saturdays, they know that I’ll do a three-hour workout and it won’t surprise them to see me later in the day running in the neighborhood.

Treadmills have their place in ultrarunning training. I’ve discovered they really help my performance both mentally and physically. However, if someday I end up in a mental hospital, you will know what put me there.

