

Spicing the Run

Most runners are in training at some time for a specific race and will be following some sort of formal or informal programme. Invariably this will include regular doses of LSD (long slow distance runs with or without hallucinations). Most runners don't mind these as club evening runs or as social runs but they can be a bit tedious if they have to be done on a regular basis as part of a race preparation regime.

One solution to the tedium is a simple "spicing of the run". The favoured method is known as "fartlek". The term derives from a Swedish word meaning "speedplay". the basic philosophy behind fartlek running is that it replicates what we all did naturally as children for fun – i.e. run here there and everywhere with unpredictable bursts of speed for varying periods of time up and down bumps, slopes and hills. This is nature's way of strengthening and developing muscles and organs through play and it is a training method which is widely used by elite endurance runners as it delivers significant conditioning benefits.

Whilst the principle behind fartlek training is scientific the application of the principle in training should be the opposite i.e. non– scientific. It defeats the object if you go out on a run with a set plan to do bursts at specific points and specific times over specific routes – this is a valid form of training but it is not fartlek.

Thus when you set off for your long run in which you intend to incorporate fartlek you should do so with a blank sheet. The only limitation is an obvious health and safety one i.e. if you are suddenly going to speed up then the route ahead and traffic (pedestrian, dog or otherwise) should allow this. It is for that reason that it is best done off-road.

It can be done in small groups with runners of similar standard taking turns to initiate the efforts and decide on the duration (but you should have confidence in your training partners).

Remember the bursts can be as long or as short as you wish and they can be time or distance related. The speed of the effort is obviously variable. Listen to your body - it will tell you are ready to go or when you should slow down and return to normal, easy pace.

Two final points : ease into and out of the run and if you are new to this type of training start off by introducing it in small doses (note back to the LSD theme!).

Gerry Reilly