

This morning, as I was fulfilling my Juneathon obligations by running 5km, I suddenly realised that my next marathon is scheduled for about 18 weeks from now – the Chester Marathon on 9 October.

Because many marathon training programmes are 18 weeks long, this is as good an occasion as any for me to share my training programme, although my running has already been structured with this marathon in mind for some time now.

Also, I have noticed that search terms such as “sub 4 hour marathon” generate quite a bit of traffic for my blog, thanks to two previous posts in which I stated my intention of running a marathon in under 4 hours for the first time in 25 years. I checked today, and the Google search results list my posts at numbers 11 and 12, so I am quite chuffed with that. But now I feel a moral obligation to provide the online searchers with a bit more meat than just intentions.

Preparation

My previous marathon was in April 2010, and my time was 4:19. In the run-up to the “official” training for this one, I wanted to achieve four things to make sure that I’m ready to begin training for a sub 4 hour marathon:

Run 10km in under 50 minutes – indicates the ability to run a marathon in 3:50.

Run 21.1km in under 1:50 – indicates the ability to run a marathon in 3:53.

Build weekly distance to over 50km.

Build long run distance to 30km.

I’ve now done all this, with the long run having been done and dusted this past weekend.

Pacing

A sub 4 hour marathon requires a pace of 5:40/km. My training is structured for an average pace of 5:30/km, with negative splits. More about that here.

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Rest weeks (green background): Every third week is a rest week to allow my muscles to recover properly and to minimise the risk of over-training.

Races (purple): I’m doing two races during the programme, and I’ve had to juggle the programme somewhat to accommodate them. In week 3, I’m doing a 38km trail race that will approach like a long run, so I won’t go all-out. In week 8, I’m doing a 24-hour relay race that will probably require of me to run 3 or 4 separate laps of 10km each over the weekend.

Easy runs (blue): Any pace, as long as it’s not faster than 6:00/km.

Tempo runs (green): Run at average race pace (5:30/km), but starting at around 5:45/km and then gradually speeding up to around 5:15/km. This is to replicate my pacing strategy for the marathon. There is also a 1km warm-up and a 1km warm-down included in these distances. The longest tempo run is just more than three weeks before the race.

Speed-work (red): The 4km sessions on Wednesdays are interval sessions with paces ranging between 5:00/km and 4:00/km. The 5km sessions on Saturdays are ParkRun time trials that I will probably run between 5:00/km and 4:30/km, but in rest weeks somewhat slower.

LSD (dark grey): These follow a three-week cycle. A “long” long run of more than 30km every third week, with a “medium” long run of 24km every third week and then either 10km or 15km every rest week. All these are done at around 7:30/km, but I will be speeding up to race pace for the last 3km – 5km to get used to running fast on tired legs towards the end of the race. My “long” long runs will take about 4 hours each, which is the time I expect to spend on my legs during the race. The longest long run of 35km is done 4 weeks before the race (Week 14), to give me ample time to recover from it.

Tapering (pink background): The tapering actually starts with the scheduled green Week 16, and then continues into Week 17 and 18. The last run is on the Wednesday before the race – a tempo run at race pace – followed by three days of complete rest (and carbo-loading).

Hills: There is no specific hill training in here, because the Chester Marathon is quite flat. Why d’ya think I chose it? Some of my long runs are trail-running on the South Downs, though, which can get quite hilly in places.

See also:

My general training principles.

Where this marathon fits into the bigger scheme of things with my running plans.

This training programme is the product of lots and lots of reading and looking at other people’s training programmes, and also of personal experience. If you have any questions, criticisms or suggestions, please post them in the comment field below – I would love to see what other runners think about this.