

Qantas The Australian Way

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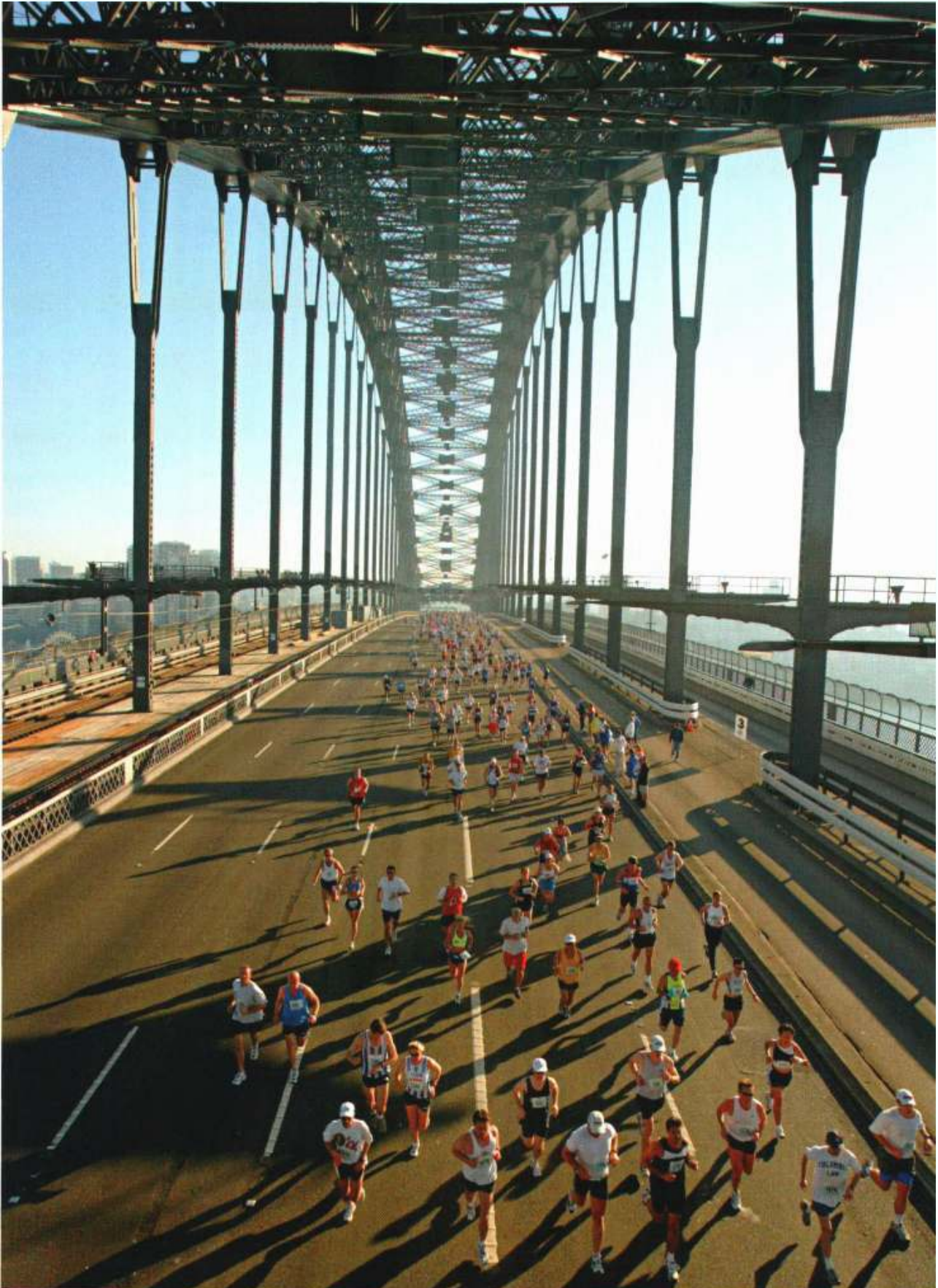
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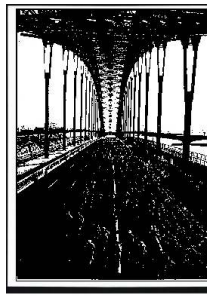
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best foot forward

Focus, dedication and training can turn any weekend jogger into a (very) long-distance runner. WORDS **BEVERLEY HADGRAFT**

LEGEND HAS IT that in ancient Greece, a soldier named Pheidippides ran from the town of Marathon to Athens to tell his people that they'd defeated Persia in the Battle of Marathon. It's believed he ran the entire distance of around 26 miles (42km) without stopping and, once he had made his announcement, unfortunately collapsed and died.

It was clearly the ultimate test of physical endurance and ever since, hundreds of thousands of runners have attempted to prove their mettle by completing – and surviving – the now standard 42.195km marathon distance.

The marathon is particularly hard because the human body can only store enough glycogen – quickly available energy – to fuel a runner for 32km. It makes that final 10km unimaginably tough or, as Brisbane marathon runner David Lang, 40, described it: “as if someone has dropped a piano on your back”.

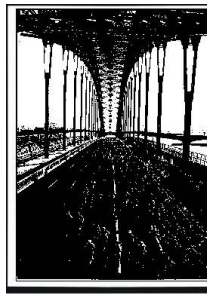
Lang ran his first marathon on the Gold Coast in 2004. He made the common mistake of not realising quite how much preparation was necessary: “It was a terribly painful experience. For the first hour after finishing, I swore I would never do anything like that again.”

However, also in common with most marathon runners, it wasn't long before Lang had forgotten his pain and was revelling in the euphoria of having completed an elite event on his own merits and with no special equipment apart from a decent pair of running shoes.

Determined to improve, Lang consulted local marathon legend Pat Carroll, joined a running club and upped his distance training from 60km a week to 90km. He included speed work and, importantly, recovery days. He also reassessed his diet. It's essential to consume plenty of carbohydrates in the days before a marathon, ensure you're well hydrated and have access to sports energy drinks. Nine >



And they're off...
Sydney Marathon runners cross
the Harbour Bridge (and opposite)



months later. Lang completed the Canberra marathon in a respectable three hours 20 minutes. Now a veteran of seven marathons, his personal best time is 3.01, which he completed in Melbourne. His next goal is to come in under three hours.

"It's become a lifestyle," Lang, a manager with the boating infrastructure branch of Queensland Transport says. "Instead of going out for a few drinks and watching the footie on a Friday night, you go to bed early so you can get up and do a long run." Doesn't he feel deprived? Not at all.

"I love that runner's high, that endorphin rush, and I really love the freedom and being fit. You have those days when you're out in the fresh air with the sun on your shoulders, listening to the rhythm of your feet hitting the pavement and it all just really works."

Not surprisingly, sports scientists are fascinated by what makes a good marathon runner. There has been particular interest in the Kalenjins, a tribe from north-west Kenya. With their long thin legs, remarkably low heart rates and ability to convert oxygen to energy very efficiently, they have produced 12 of the world's top 20 distance runners.

Interestingly, too, there is evidence that indicates women are more suited to the demands of endurance running as they metabolise fuel differently. Certainly, the world's leading female marathon runner, the UK's Paula Radcliffe, has a best time of 2.15.25, which is less than 11 minutes behind that recorded by the top male runner.

This news would undoubtedly please Sydney lawyer Lisa Anne Davie, 31, who took up running after becoming concerned at the lack of balance in her busy professional life. She joined the Sydney Striders club and recalls: "It was just great. There were people there of all ages and abilities, shapes and sizes – the only thing they had in common was that they loved running."

More importantly, there were runners with up to 30 years' experience and Davie began to soak up all the training tips.

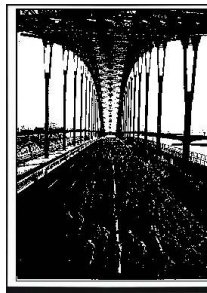
"I like to challenge myself. I trained three or four times a week and progressed in leaps and bounds," she says. After doing a decent half marathon in 2005, she decided to attempt the Sydney marathon. Having run 80-90km a week – split into five runs including one long run, one 20-25km run and



Out in the fresh air with the sun on your shoulders, listening to the rhythm of your feet on the pavement, it all just works"

Manhattan-bound:
runners in the New
York City Marathon





the rest 10-15 km – she was confident, but admits to a rush of nerves on the start line. “I started off too fast and had to keep telling myself to calm down. At 32km it really started to hurt and I was counting down the kilometres, but when I saw the finish line and heard my family calling my name. I managed a sprint. I was so happy. I felt like bawling my eyes out. But I couldn’t because I didn’t have any fluids left in me.

“My time was 3.26 and I knew immediately I’d do another one because although it was painful, the feeling of accomplishment was fabulous.”

Since then, Davie has done a couple of bush marathons. Standing 1.58m tall and 57kg, weight issues are a worry of the past. “It’s changed my perception of myself. Marathon running is something I’m good at. I’m not elite, but I am competitive and it gives me confidence to achieve my goals. When you tell people you’ve run a marathon, they’re inevitably impressed and it’s a real boost for your confidence.”

All marathon runners admit that one of the most frustrating aspects of the event is that you can spend months preparing for a race only to be forced to withdraw due to a cold or injury. This makes environmental scientist Peter Black’s marathon achievements even more extraordinary.

A Melburnian, Black had run several marathons by the age of 49 and decided that as a midlife goal he would run every >

RACES TO REMEMBER

■ **SYDNEY MARATHON**

September 23, 2007

Start at the Harbour Bridge and finish at the Opera House – in between there are city and suburban streets, Centennial Park and Anzac Bridge.

www.sydneyrunningfestival.org

■ **NEW YORK CITY MARATHON**

November 4, 2007

Applications have closed, but interested runners can participate in a charity program.

www.nycmarathon.org

■ **LONDON MARATHON**

April 13, 2008

Ballot closes end of October.

www.london-marathon.co.uk

■ **BOSTON MARATHON**

April 21, 2008

One of the most prestigious. Entrants must run a qualifying time at a certified marathon to be accepted.

www.bostonmarathon.org

■ **GREAT WALL MARATHON**

May 17, 2008

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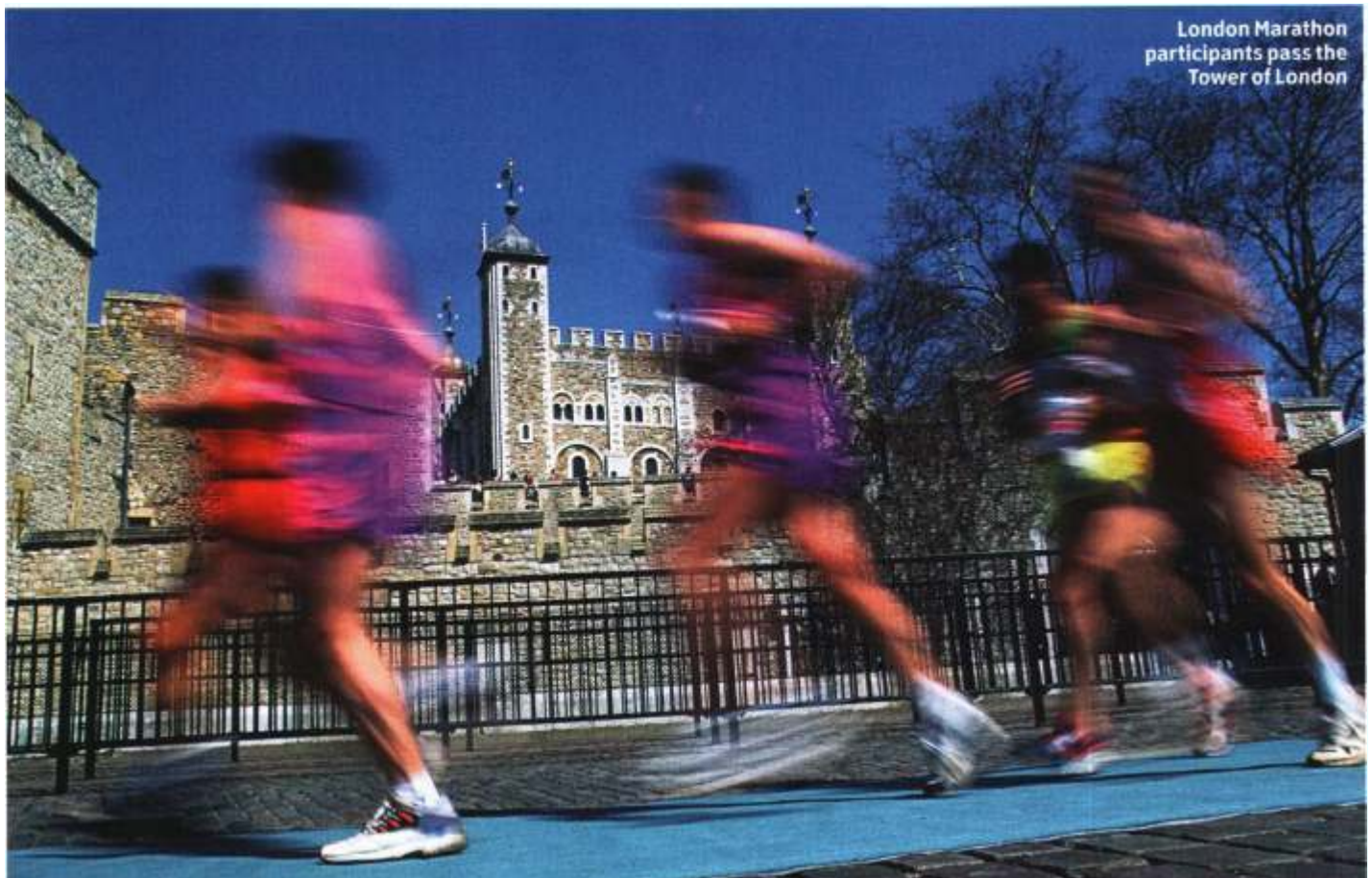
www.great-wall-marathon.org

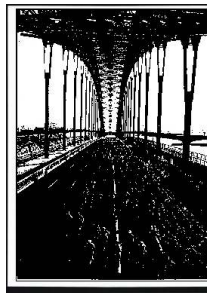
■ **ANTARCTICA MARATHON**

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www.marathontour.com





major marathon in every state and capital territory by the time of his 50th birthday in November 2005.

Realising it was important to finish each in a positive state of mind in order to psych himself up for the next one, he vowed to run them within his comfort zone – around 3.30 – and began that January in Hobart.


He followed up with Canberra in April, the Gold Coast in July, Perth the following week, Alice Springs in August, Adelaide a week later, Sydney in September and Melbourne in October.

Not surprisingly each had its own attractions but, says Black, "I think the

Gold Coast was my favourite because everyone gets behind it, from the local council and traders to state government. It's family friendly with shorter races as well and lots of post-race entertainment."

However, Black's favourite marathon is the Great Ocean Road race in Victoria, for its spectacular scenery.

"I've spoken to runners who have competed all over the world who say it's the most beautiful they've ever run."

Black would no doubt admit, though, that every completed marathon is an amazing achievement. "Running is the greatest metaphor for life. You get out of it what you put into it." 

TRAINING TIPS

JIM MOODY, who has trained a number of marathon runners with Sydney Striders, suggests:

■ **BE PREPARED**

As a general entry level you should be able to run 10km in under 60 minutes before contemplating a marathon.

■ **DIY IS NOT AN OPTION**

Train with or under the guidance of an experienced runner who has completed a number of marathons and can provide you with a written training program and advice as you improve. Programs are also available on the websites of many marathons such as the Gold Coast. Stick to your program religiously.

■ **KEEP MOTIVATED**

Find a running buddy of similar ability or join a running club. Be aware that it will take six months of solid work to complete the necessary training so any other social life may be lost.

■ **REST AND RECUPERATION**

Remember to take rest days – they are as important as the training. Don't overdo your weekly program. As you start to get stronger you'll want to run further, but follow your program no matter what, as exceeding it will lead to injuries.

■ **LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE**

Talk to as many marathoners as you can and ask for advice on everything from shoes and clothing to gels and drinking on the run. Watch your diet and make sure you're getting enough carbohydrates and fluids. You'll be running a minimum of around 80-100km a week during your peak training period and will need to replace all the energy you lose.

■ **LOOKING AND FEELING GOOD**

Wear good-quality shoes, socks, shorts and tops. If anything does not fit properly anywhere it will cause grief somewhere along the way.



For a comprehensive calendar of all road races, including marathons, in Australia and overseas, check out www.coolrunning.com.au