

An Inline Marathon Primer

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by Eddy Matzger

Eddy Matzger ran a marathon in 2:43 in 1987, then skated one in 1:01 more than ten years later. Dan Burger comes from a long line of distance lovers and most recently established a new world record, skating 191 miles in 12 hours. Both skate for Team TWINCAM and are proud train and race with the winning combination of Salomon skates, TWINCAM bearings, and Explore wheels, Transpack, Wigwam, and PowerBar. For more tips on how to train for events big and small, consult www.skatecentral.com

If you can skate down the block, then you can also skate down the next block, and the one after that too, until before you know it you've skated a whole marathon. Granted, a marathon is a long way -- 26.2 miles to be exact -- but it's not like it's all the way from here to Timbuktu. With a little preparation, any skater can finish a marathon and still be the life of the post-race party.

Personal goals are never fulfilled overnight, so it's a good idea to allow yourself a solid chunk of time to get ready for the big event. Three months is ideal. That way you'll have plenty of time to build a base, gradually increase your training intensity, fine tune your workouts for more speed, compete in some "warm-up" events, and even fit in a taper before the big day.

Along the way, you'll be happy to find that there will be no stress on the knees, no long distance loneliness, no walls to hit. Whether you have three weeks or three months, your finished marathon will be an honest reflection of your process of preparation. So get out there and shine it on!

Remember why?

You skate in the first place because it's so much fun, so don't get locked into a routine that turns exercising into a chore. Mix it up. For example, vary your skate routes by hitting the hills one day and the flats the next. Or, if there's only one loop at your disposal, skate it a different way every time -- forwards, backwards, while doing intervals, and so on.

So blurred is the distinction between work and play on skates that you can always get a workout without realizing it. Hockey, dancing, roller-soccer, and even social skates are examples of training disguised as fun. Stay motivated by keeping the combinations endless.

Want to get serious?

Elite athletes divide up their marathon preparation into distinct periods of training to maximize their strength, speed, and endurance over time. In order to keep your fitness curve rising, you need to periodize. Periodization requires establishing a training schedule that includes base work in the beginning, increasing duration and intensity in the middle section, and speed-work and tapering towards the end.

If your mission is to hammer in the elite ranks and the marathon is still six months away, why not try to double periodize? You'll have to go through the whole training cycle twice, increasing both intensity and duration gradually throughout. Done right, it will be impossible not to feel the huge training effect of such solid preparation.

Where to begin?

You'll need to pour a good foundation before you start increasing the intensity of your workouts. Longer sessions of low intensity skating in the first month will build your aerobic base and get your muscles, tendons, and ligaments ready for the rigors of hammering when you enter the latter phases of marathon preparation.

Known as LSD in the popular lexicon, long slow distance allows you to cruise along comfortably and still derive enormous cardiovascular benefits. Within a few weeks you'll notice a real difference. You'll be going faster with the same perceived level of exertion as before. Regular cruising starts costing far less than it used to.

During this early buildup phase, give your long-distance skating muscles a rest sometimes by biking, swimming, or even playing with your favorite Frisbee dog. Varying your training in this way will keep you always rabid with skating desire.

How to get the most out of training?

Any kind of cross training will cause you to post fitness and strength gains, but to prime your body for inline skating nothing beats specificity.

Specificity means coming as close as you can to the specific muscle movement that is used in the sport in which you wish to excel. It also means doing what most closely mimics the type and degree of exercise stress you undergo in competition.

For example, slide-boarding and cross-country skate skiing serve as great training tools for inline skating because they imitate many of the same muscular movements and intensity levels. Nevertheless, nothing compares to actually skating.

Remember too that specificity also has application to different intensities, not just movements. For racing a marathon, you need not only strength and endurance to maintain a good steady pace, but also acceleration and speed for surging and sprinting. As marathon day draws near, your training schedule should become more and more specific to the real thing.

A typical weekly workout will train each of the three specific intensity zones but on different days. On race day you will cross in and out of all the zones, but during your training you should endeavor to keep them separate and distinct. By stressing your body at different intensities and giving yourself plenty of rest in between, you will maximize your potential for rapid improvement.

How hard to go?

The fitter you get, the more fun it is to hammer. Your body needs to get to know the three intensity levels at which will most benefit your training: long slow distance, anaerobic threshold training, and high intensity work. When you learn to mix the three zones together in the proper amounts, you'll continue to raise your average speed, increase your top speed, and nudge up the fun factor.

Zone 1

Long Slow Distance, or zone 1, contains a range of very slow to medium paced workouts. This corresponds to approximately 55-75% of your maximum heart rate. If you can talk comfortably while training in this zone, then you're in there.

Heap the LSD workouts onto your plate five to six days a week during the first month. Your appetite for endorphins will steadily increase as your fitness improves. By the end of the first phase, the hour-long training snacks from the beginning will have progressed into two and three hour engorgement.

Zone 2

Anaerobic threshold (AT) training is the main focus of your second phase. Your legs and lungs start burning when you have entered this zone, because your circulatory system is unable to evacuate lactic acid as fast as you produce it. AT workouts consist of one to two hour-long sessions carried out at intensity where your talking and breathing become labored.

Going out on a training skate while drafting behind a swift bicycle is a good example of AT training. At 75-90% of your maximum heart rate, these rolls are serious fun. Even though these workouts can be spiked with a little pain, you'll be begging for a refill every few days.

Zone 3

Once you've turned up the heat with some prolonged AT training, get ready to jump into the fire. High intensity, or max training sessions, are very short in duration, but done at 100% of your maximum heart rate. These intervals are heavily taxing, which is why they shouldn't be introduced until at least halfway through the second phase of your training.

These workouts are like the hot chilies you might put on your food - they'll enhance the flavor, but don't overdo it! High intensity training may fry your muscles in the anaerobic skillet, but they shouldn't burn you so badly that you'll never come back for more.

Find a controlled environment, like a quiet loop or a parking structure, so you can time your efforts without the distractions of cars or traffic lights. 10 to 15 thirty-second long intervals, with one-minute rest between each one, is a huge example of a max training episode.

All in all, that adds up to less than ten minutes of hard work, but if you've done it right, your legs will quiver and feel as if they're setting in cement. Don't forget the importance of preceding your heavy workout with a good 20-minute warm-up, then following it up with an equally sensible 20 minute warm-down.

How to keep tabs on my training?

A heart rate monitor is a fine tool for assessing your training, but beware! You may love to hate it. On the one hand, a heart-rate monitor can be your savior, preventing you from going too hard during the first period of your training. But it can also assume the role of slave driver, forcing you to push harder when you need to get it up closer to your max. In any event, a heart rate monitor will help you find the right intensity whatever the zone.

Don't get so dependent on your heart rate monitor that you take it to bed with you. Once you develop a good feel for your own pulse rate and corresponding level of exertion, try putting it away occasionally. You'll learn to listen to your body better.

As a general rule, you should be able to rap with your buds when you are in the base training zone. If your skating conversation starts sounding like a dirty crank call, you'll know you've passed into the anaerobic threshold zone and it's time to concentrate on not losing it. Fleeing a large dog as fast as your skates can carry you -- and too short of breath to scream for help -- it's a sure sign that you've entered the maximum intensity realm.

Enough- or too much?

Workload is a combination of intensity and volume. Dialing up the right mix is a relative thing, since everyone handles the stress of working out and recovering differently. You'll have to tailor your workout to your individual needs. For example, don't make the mistake of struggling to keep up with someone on an easy day even if your partner is on his or her easy day as well.

Rest is too often forgotten during the serious marathoner's training schedule. Listen. If your body tells you it's tired, don't push it. Too much training and not enough down-time could lead leads to diminishing returns and burnout, so don't get caught in the old trap of thinking "if a little is good then more is better." Take your training down a notch and soon you'll feel like a kangaroo again.

How does it all fit together?

In a three-month training scenario, you don't really start cranking it up until after the first full month of building a base. During each successive week thereafter, you'll be eating up more and more miles faster and faster.

Higher intensities will start to take center stage in the six-weeks after the first month.

During the first two-week period, weeks 5 and 6 of your three month schedule, substitute two days of threshold training in place of the LSD workouts. Meanwhile, keep doing the low intensity work as a "recovery" workout on other days.

Experiment with putting a hurt to your body during weeks 7 and 8. Slowly increase the number of high intensity skates from two a week to four a week. Two to three threshold days and one to two sprint/interval days are practicable every other day. This is when a sprint day will seem like a rest compared to your threshold training! In-between days should include very low intensity workouts of relatively short duration.

In the last few weeks before you taper, get out the microscope and take little look closer. Try an event or two and see how your body responds. Do you need more speed or more staying power? Adjust your training according to your desire and potential.

When to let off the gas?

As you near the end of your marathon preparation, you'll have developed good body sense as well as a full-blooded addiction to working out. Feeling like a greyhound, it's going to be tough to muster the willpower to back off from hard training in the weeks prior to the big event, but if you really want to be at your best when it counts, you'll have to force yourself to taper.

You won't suddenly become fat and out of shape from working out less. Quite the contrary, you'll feel the boost. Cutting out the high intensity workouts will allow your legs, body, and mind the time to rebound for the race. Typically, a taper lasts two weeks, although yours might be different. Highly trained athletes need a shorter taper to reach their peak. Those less adapted to stress benefit from longer tapers.

What's the moral of the story?

If you want the legendary strength and endurance of the elephant along with the speed and acceleration of the cheetah, you'll need to make a conscientious effort to differentiate between the three zones of intensity during the three periods of your training.

Working in the proper zone at the right time will prime your body for a fast marathon time. On race day you'll have the chance to let it all hang out, confidant of your preparation. Even if you've only been around the block a few times, you can still make it across the finish and feel good about yourself. Pace yourself according to how much work you've done. That way, your marathon experience will be a continuous high, a true celebration of life!

13 week Training schedule- next page

Week 1: Base training

Mon - day off

Tues - 30 minutes at 70% max HR

Wed - 30 minutes at 70% max HR

Thurs - 30 minutes at 70% max HR

Fri - day off

Sat - 60 minutes at 60% max HR

Sun - 90 minutes at 60% max HR

Week 4: Last week of base training

Mon - day off

Tues - 60 minutes at 75% max HR

Wed - 60-90 minutes at 65% max HR

Thurs - 60 minutes at 65% max HR

Fri - 60 minutes at 75% max HR

Sat - 1 1/2 - 2 hours at 65% max HR

Sun - 2 - 3 hours at 60% max HR

Week 5: first week of threshold training

Mon - day off

Tues - 1 hour at Anaerobic Threshold (AT) 75-90% max (talking difficult)

Wed - 90 minutes at AT

Thurs - day off

Fri - 1 hour at 55% max HR - very easy

Sat - 90 minutes at AT

Sun - 2 hours at 55% max HR - easy

Week 8: middle of threshold training

Mon - 1 hour slightly above AT (talking very difficult)

Tues - day off

Wed - Sprints/intervals - 15 min at 95-100%

Thurs - day off

Fri - 1 hour at AT (talking difficult)

Sat - day off or 1 hour at 60% - easy

Sun - 2 hours at AT (talking difficult)

Week 11: last week of threshold training

Mon - day off

Tues - 1 hour at AT

Wed - Sprints - 10-15 minutes at 100% (i.e. 5 x 1 min plus 10 x 30 sec)

Thurs - day off

Fri - 1-2 hours at AT

Sat - Intervals - 20 minutes at 95% (i.e. 10 x 2 min)

Sun - 1-2 hours at 55% - very easy

Week 13: last week of taper - race week

Mon - 1 hour at 70% max HR

Tues - 1 hour at 70% max HR

Wed - day off

Thurs - 1 hour at 60% max HR

Fri - 30 min - 1 hour at 55% max HR

Sat - day off or 15 minutes at 55-65% max HR

Sun - Race!