

GIRL CAN RUN: Chrissie broke her own record to win Challenge Roth 2011

FOCUS

MORE ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER. TARGET YOUR RUN SESSIONS FOR INCREASED SPEED WITHOUT OVERUSE INJURIES



STEPS TO A FASTER RUN

We all want to run faster, even three-time world champion Chrissie Wellington who regularly outruns the men. Kristian Manietta has four surefire steps to improving your run.

TEXT BY KRISTIAN MANIETTA | PHOTOGRAPHY BY IMAGENET/DREAMSTIME.COM/DELLY CARR 

Running in triathlon differs from its single sport counterpart and because of this we need to train a little differently. The major difference between triathletes and pure runners is that triathletes start the run in an already fatigued state, which means their stride is shorter and the end of stride leg lift is lower, so the overall range of motion is less. Our body needs to be able to tolerate the demands we place on our muscles, joints, tendons

and bones. Massage, self-massage and mobility drills will help and there are two distinct times when these should be done: "PreGen" (muscle and movement preparation before a session) and "ReGen" (recovery based), both of which have been discussed in previous issues (see: 'A Better Way To Warm Up' in *Australian Triathlete Volume 18.2*; 'Get Mobile' in *Volume 18.3* and 'Back In Motion' in *Volume 18.4*). Both preparation and recovery are often overlooked in training sessions because most

athletes think getting faster comes with the simple addition of more training. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Look after your body and it will look after you. Once you have taken care of preparation and recovery measures, there are several key components involved in developing your run which need to be factored into your workouts to enable you to hit your potential. We've broken this down into four key points which are explored on the following pages.

1 DEVELOP YOUR STRIDE RATE

The key to triathlon running is a naturally high stride rate. After their first attempt many athletes claim it is impossible to increase their stride rate, however with persistence you can learn how to do this and eventually it will become second nature during your races. It might not be easy, but it is doable for everyone.

You need to focus and aim for a high stride rate in each and every run, this will help you naturally adopt a more efficient stride that is ideal for triathlon. Another benefit of getting your stride rate into the mid 90s (steps per minute) is that because you are effectively breaking the work your muscles have to do into smaller chunks, you reduce the impact of each stride, helping prevent injuries and countering the viscosity that builds up in your legs after higher intensity or longer bike sessions.

The goal in training is 96 steps per foot, per minute. It takes time and focus to develop but this is what will keep you moving fast, particularly late in an Ironman. Your stride rate won't necessarily be quite this high but by constantly striving to hit this stride rate in training, you will naturally adopt a rate that will be in the 90s.

You can assist the process by using a treadmill set at 0 per cent (yes, we're using it as an assist) or a slight downhill gradient. Both these options will allow you to run quicker than you could on flat ground for the same aerobic cost.

What we're doing here is training your muscles and nerves to fire at a faster rate of speed for the same aerobic effort. This is very a specific skill that requires high repetition via controlled terrain (i.e. treadmill or a slight downhill gradient) to develop and will create optimal muscle memory.

Over time you will get a higher quality motor pattern development session and a more effective training session which helps develop another important performance indicator – the ability to hold form under duress.



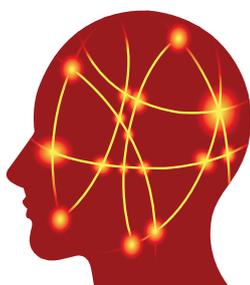
2 CONCENTRATION

Developing your run means you need to stop seeking "just a workout". How often do you fully concentrate in your sessions, or are you easily distracted?

Think about meditation. It is a concentrated focus on what the body and breath is doing now that teaches mental concentration and discipline, eventually achieving a higher form of relaxed attention. In sports this is called "being in the zone".

Focused repetition of movements (i.e. like stride rate), intervals and training sessions are needed to teach concentration and help you focus your mind on what you're doing.

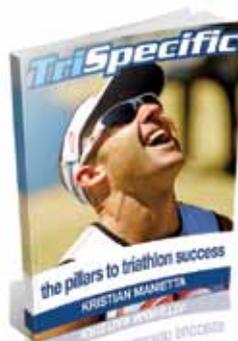
If you cannot concentrate in training, there is no way in hell you can concentrate in racing. When your mind starts to wander, your perceived effort shoots upwards and your pace drops. Make an effort to "be there" in training. Many athletes don't get the full benefit of their training because they are unfocused and distracted. >>



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Make it count. Training should never be about simply going through the motions – each and every session should have a purpose.



3 SPECIFIC ENDURANCE FOR SPECIFIC PACE

What I find interesting when talking with athletes, especially when gunning for a goal time whether it be on the run or bike, is that they rarely spend much training time at or faster than their goal pace.

Most of their focus is exclusively on accumulating hours on the run or in the saddle at a slower pace than they intend to race. They have spent countless hours developing a "base" and all that does is train the speed and strength right out of them. It also increases their chances of gaining an injury.

With this preparation it is difficult to see how an athlete will be able to find the ability to run at a pace that hasn't been drilled into them in training.

IMPORTANT NOTE: I am not saying go out there and cover the race distances in training at your intended goal pace. This will kill you quickly and is not necessary.

I have said it numerous times and will say it again: endurance and fitness are not developed exclusively via your long sessions. They can and should be achieved by more frequent but shorter focused sessions. Slow, long sessions do have a place in the overall training phase and can help increase fitness when done correctly, that is at a

truly easy pace that will help soak up the quality work you have done. But to develop the specific endurance to run at your goal pace you need to spend significant amounts of training time slightly slower than your goal pace, at your goal pace and even slightly faster than your goal pace – and don't forget your stride rate!

4 RUNNING OFF THE BIKE

We can and should be highly specific about running off the bike because it provides an immense opportunity to develop form under duress. The athlete who sustains form as the body fatigues is the one who will end up going faster.

Running off the bike with the view of just getting it done to develop fitness is a waste of precious time. You need a real purpose. Your purpose should be to train your neuromuscular system, and since it doesn't provoke "deep fatigue", you can and should train this system when you have significant muscular fatigue, such as after a longer bike or specific strength set.

Triathlon run skills can be summed up in one simple statement: run fast on tired legs. As mentioned above, developing your stride rate is a major factor in achieving this and so I highly recommend that you include brief runs off the bike

running (or developing) at a high stride rate in your brick sessions.

There are obviously numerous other factors involved in triathlon run performance such as shoe choice, nutrition, sleep, etc. but if you work diligently on the components discussed above you will begin to see huge performance gains in your run. Make it count. Training should never be about simply going through the motions – each and every session should have a purpose.

Good luck and I look forward to hearing about your success! **AT**

Kristian Manietta
www.trispecific.com
www.tptherapy.com.au

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