

42.2km
26.2 miles

marathon

running

13.1 miles

BEAT YOUR
PERSONAL BEST
WITH BEETROOT
JUICE

HOW TO
TAPER
EFFECTIVELY

WHY MEASURE
HEART RATE?

The
MELBOURNE
MARATHON
EXPERIENCE

Contents

42.2 km
26.2 miles

marathon
running

13.1 miles
21.1 km



1

Welcome to the eighth issue of Marathon Running magazine



3

Long May You Run
The evolutionary psychology of marathon running



6

Beat your personal best with Beetroot Juice



12

The Melbourne Marathon Experience



22

Why Measure Heart Rate?



27

How to taper effectively



32

Print your own runners



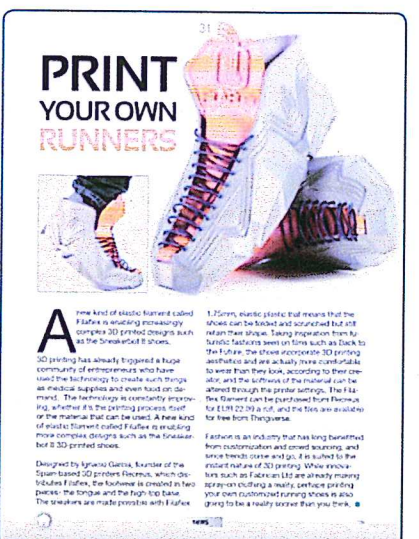
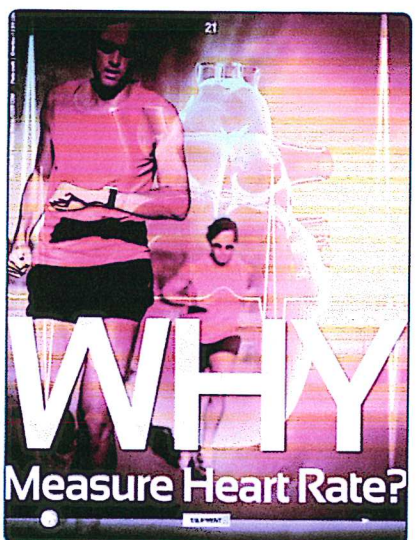
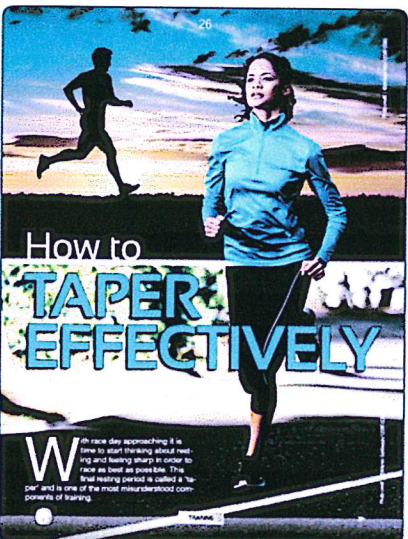
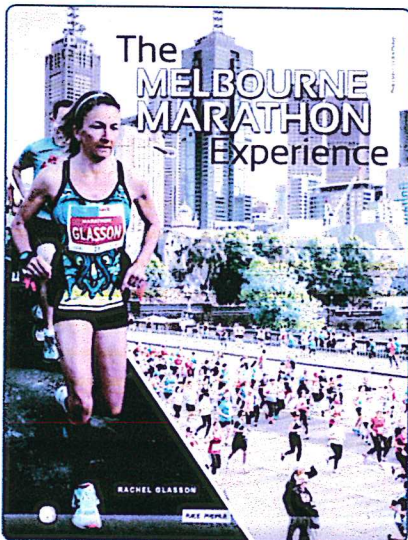
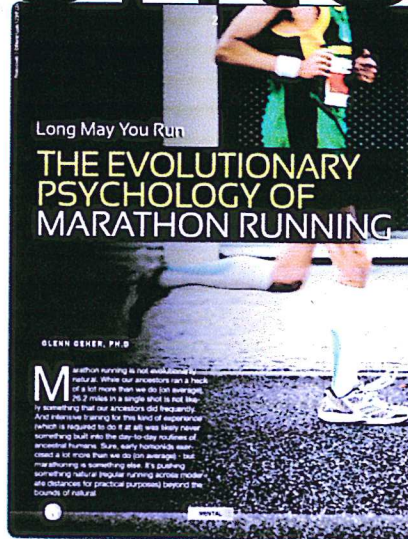
33

At 89, London Marathon's oldest competitor determined to carry on running for another two years so he can compete with his grandson



35

Boston runners 'take back the finish line'



Long May You Run

THE EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY OF MARATHON RUNNING

GLENN GEHER, PH.D

Marathon running is not evolutionarily natural. While our ancestors ran a heck of a lot more than we do (on average), 26.2 miles in a single shot is not likely something that our ancestors did frequently. And intensive training for this kind of experience (which is required to do it at all) was likely never something built into the day-to-day routines of ancestral humans. Sure, early homonids exercised a lot more than we do (on average) - but marathoning is something else. It's pushing something natural (regular running across moderate distances for practical purposes) beyond the bounds of natural.



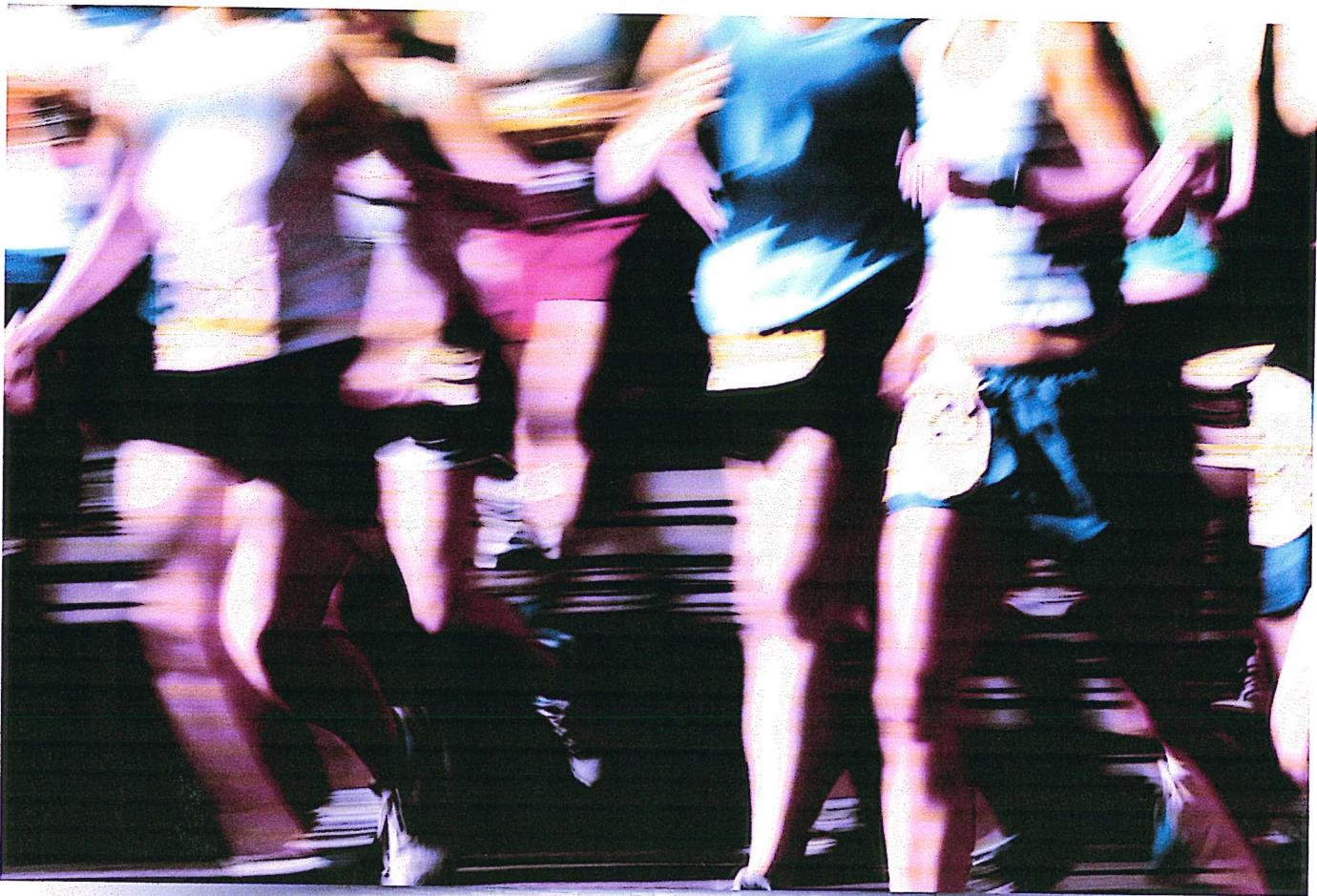


Photo credit: © Suzanne Tucker/123RF.COM

This is not to say that modern-day marathon running is unrelated to our evolutionary heritage. Everything about our species is ultimately and importantly related to our evolutionary heritage.

I ran my 8th-ever marathon a few months ago in coastal New Hampshire. It was painful, it was hours, it was cold, it was rainy. And, for some reason, I loved it. I guess this article is partly me trying to figure out why!

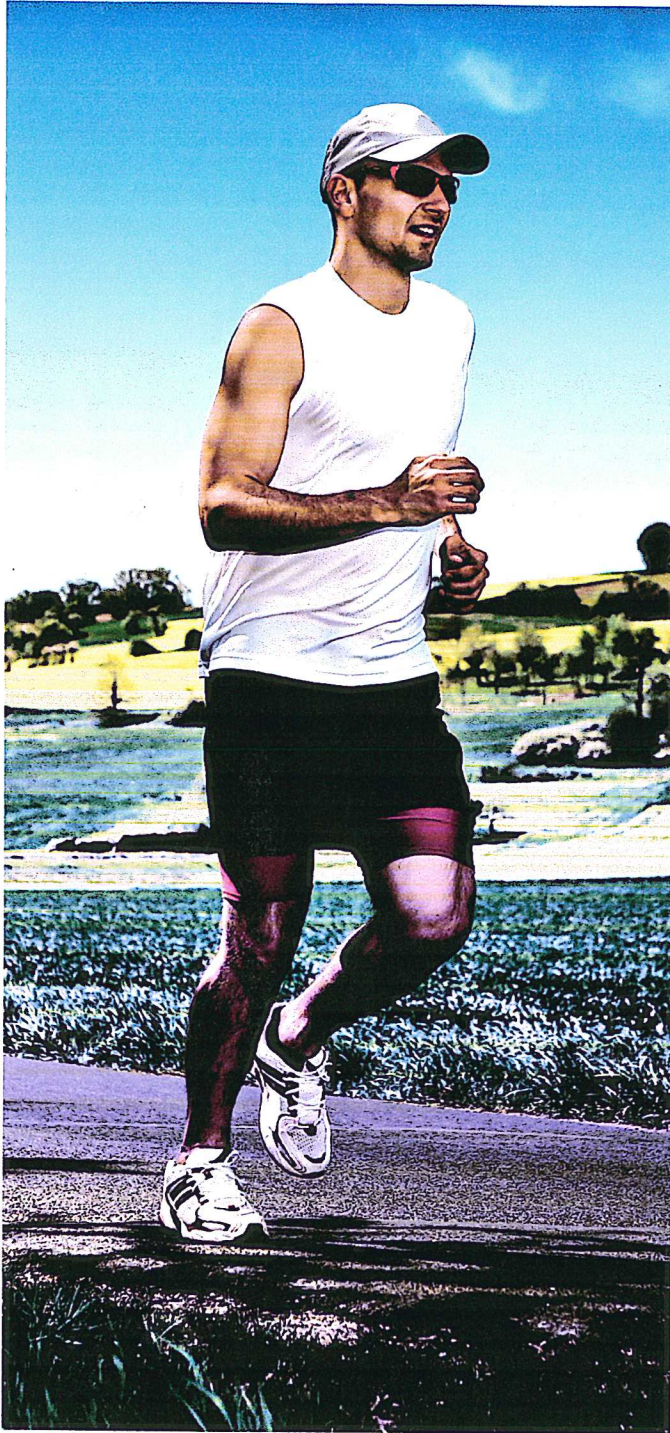
Marathoning is, in its own way, the ultimate in self-sacrifice. And it's conspicuous. When someone says that he or she has run a marathon, people think lots of things - they think "bucket list" - they think "wow, why would anyone ever do that?" - they think, in a very literal sense, "that's extraordinary." You're putting your body through something dangerously rigorous - and you're paying money to do it - and ... why???

I think of marathoning largely in terms of the evolutionary psychology of signals - signals to others as well as signals to oneself. Sure, marathoning is a clear signal to others - it indicates things such as:

- I can work extraordinarily hard - and then some.
- I can handle an unnatural physical feat.
- I have more perseverance than average.
- I can put the short-term interests of myself to the side.
- and probably more ...

But it's also a signal to oneself - as a lot of things are. As Daryl Bem (1967) taught us years ago, we often see ourselves as if through the eyes of another. What did I learn about myself in that 4-hour-and-43-minute span of time in the rain on the New Hampshire Seacoast? Well I guess I learned that I'm a hard-worker - that I can put my immediate interests to the side to reach a bigger goal - that I can persevere through adversity. That I can achieve something extraordinary (even if my time was way slower than my times from a decade ago!). Marathon running is a big-time industry - for complicated reasons - but for reasons that importantly result from our evolutionary heritage. It's not that running 26.2 miles is "natural" - it's not - it's actually beyond reasonable in terms of what human bodies would encounter under ancestral conditions.





And in terms of what human bodies can handle. But as conspicuous-consumption theorists such as Geoffrey Miller (2000) point out, many of the conspicuous things about human nature have much to do with signaling - and such signaling is often just as much signaling to oneself as to others.

Some things about humans just make little sense unless we apply an evolutionary lens. In my analysis of why I ran - and actually enjoyed - the Smuttynose Rockfest marathon in NH last September - marathon running emerges as exactly this kind of uniquely human phenomenon. The training was painful and time-consuming. The financial and time-related costs of the race (and the travel) were tangible. The weather was unpleasant. Why do people do these things? What did I gain? Why did I enjoy this experience? Why did thousands of people sign up for this "relatively small" race?

Clearly there are lots of questions here and they'll only be partially answered at best. But from an evolutionary perspective, it strikes me that I learned something about myself with this experience - and the many brave souls who ran alongside me (and who often passed me) learned the same kinds of lessons. If I can do this, I must be capable of lots of great things. And this sounds to me, like a pretty adaptive lesson. Let's hope I'm at least partly right, because long-distance running can be pretty painful and I've got a 10-miler planned for this weekend! ■

References:

Bem, D. J. (1967). Self-Perception: An Alternative Interpretation of Cognitive Dissonance Phenomena. *Psychological Review*, 74, 183-200.

Miller G. F. (2000). *The mating mind: How sexual choice shaped the evolution of human nature*; London, Heineman.

» GLENN GEHER, PH.D



Glenn Geher, Ph.D., is professor and chair of psychology at the State University of New York at New Paltz, where he teaches courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and conducts research in various areas related to evolutionary psychology. He has published several books, including [Mating Intelligence Unleashed: The Role of the Mind in Sex, Dating, and Love](#) as well as [Straightforward Statistics: Understanding the Tools of Research and Evolutionary Psychology](#) 101.

