

THE THRESHOLD RUN

The threshold run is an important part of training to improve race performance. It's so named because it raises your anaerobic/lactate/ventilatory threshold, so you can run at a higher speed for a longer distance.

When running, you're probably aware of two threshold or change points as you increase your pace, related to your breathing. The first occurs at quite an easy pace. This is the transition from running slowly (chatting pace), to the point where you become slightly breathless, but can still talk a bit and run for miles. As you continue to run faster, your breathing becomes heavier, but is still under control: typically you're taking a breath every 3 or 4 steps. The second threshold occurs at the point where your breathing becomes uncontrolled, you can't speak, and you're basically gasping for breath!

Threshold training enables you to run faster before you reach this point. This is achieved by hitting the threshold point; then easing back slightly; then picking the pace up to hit the threshold again, repeated over a 20-30 minute run. Threshold training increases your heart capacity, so it can deliver more blood per beat to your muscles, and strengthens the heart muscle. It also trains your brain to accept this level of exertion as normal.

Much of our Tuesday training is intended to be run at threshold pace. Most of your races (up to 10k, or maybe ½ marathon for some) will be run at threshold pace. You only need one (two at the most) threshold sessions per week to stay race fit. A typical session includes a 15 minute warm up, 20-30 minutes at threshold pace, then 15 minutes cool down. Use a heart rate monitor to note where your threshold point occurs, and then you can use this information to help pace yourself when racing.